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GREVILLE LANDON.

A NOVEL.

BY

PIER LISLE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

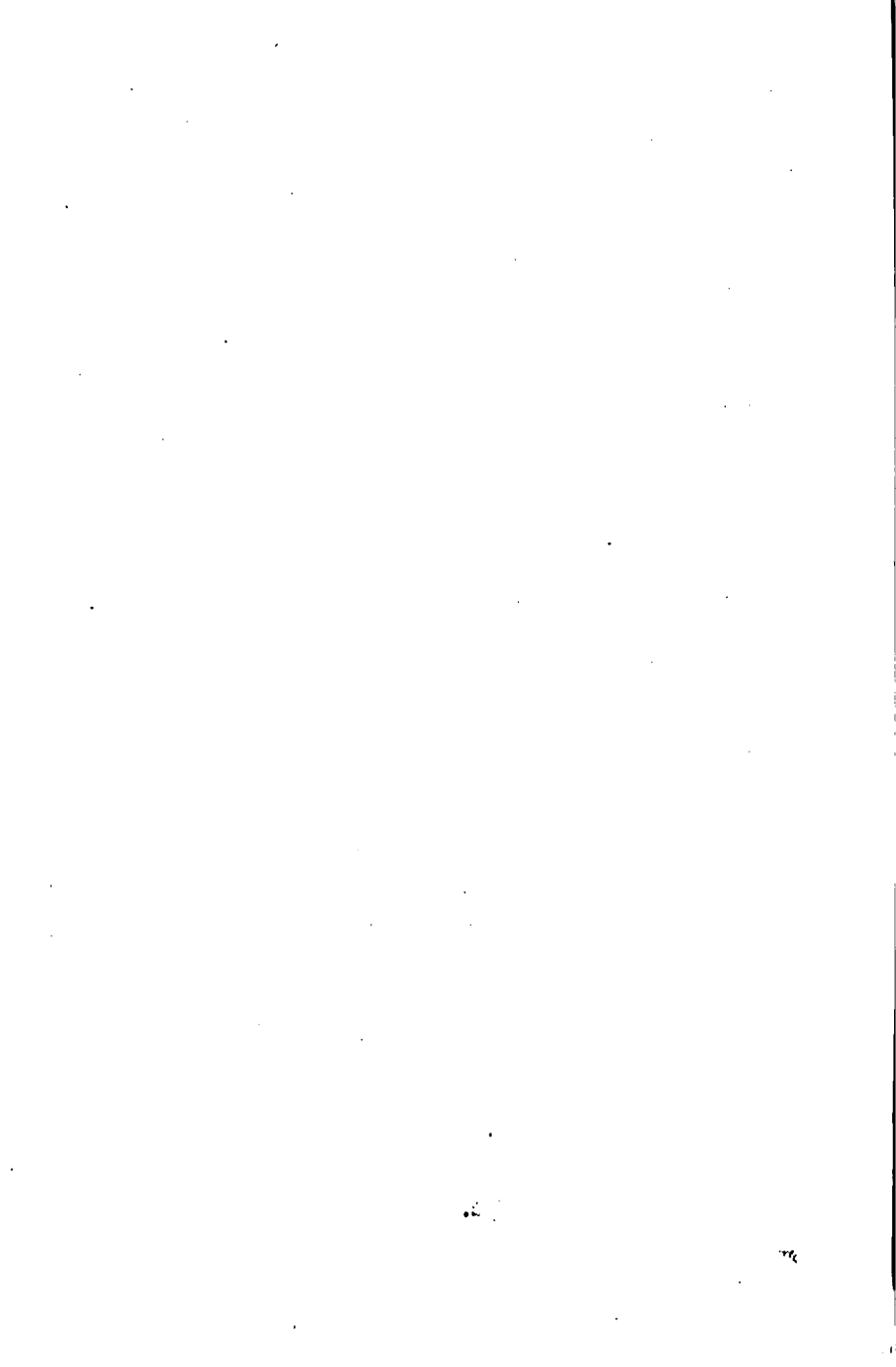
VOL. I.

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1872.

249. y. 515.



TO MY BELOVED MOTHER

THE FOLLOWING PAGES

ARE AFFECTIONATELY

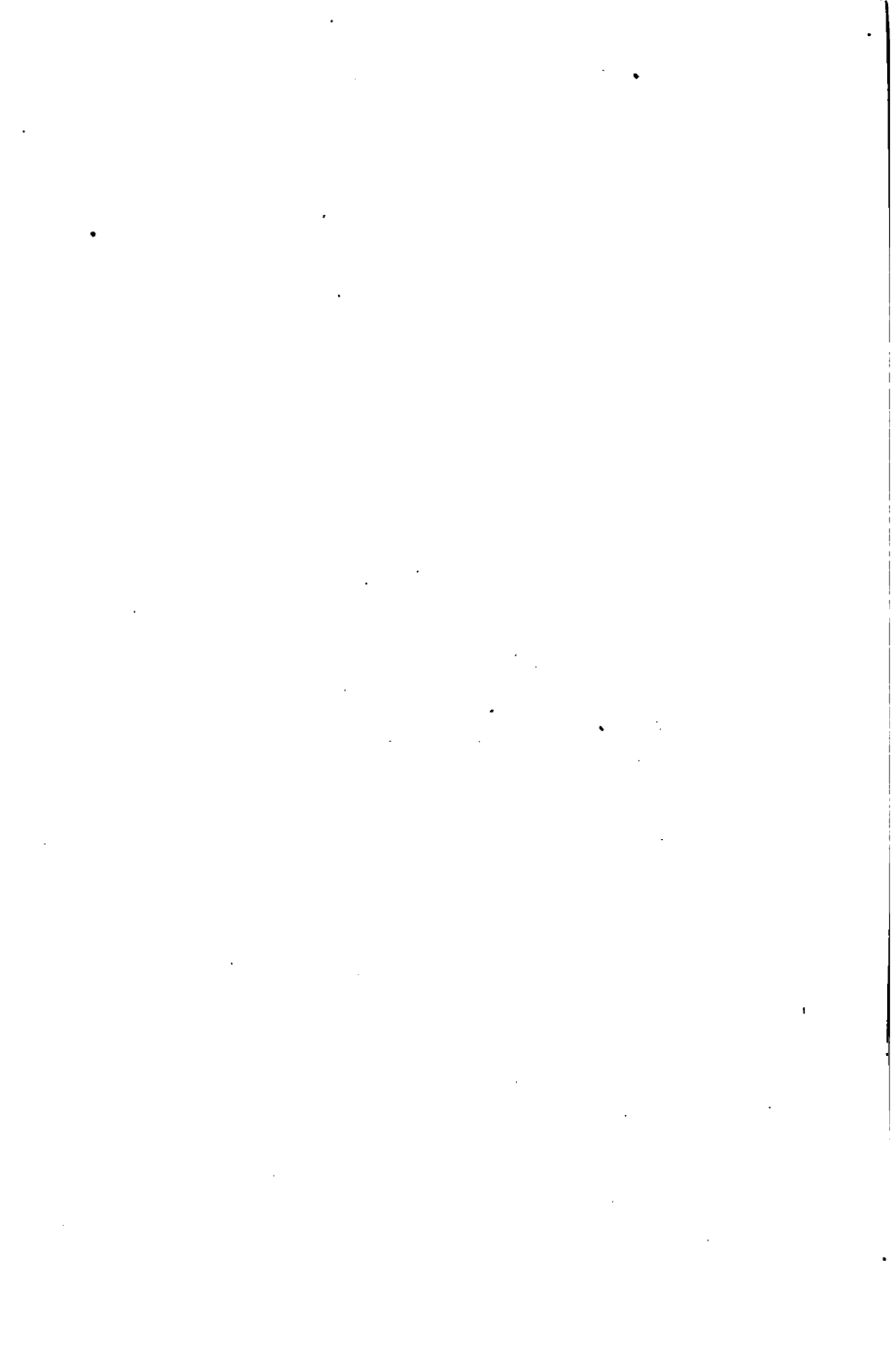
Inscribed.



BOOK I

*"Felices ter et amplius
Quos irrupta tenet copula, nec malis
Divulsus querimoniis
Suprema citius solvet amor die!"*

HORACE.




GREVILLE LANDON.

CHAPTER I.

"Life is spent before we know what it is."

OLD PROVERB.

" CAN scarcely believe that it is already six years ago that I came to London," said George Berthon to the friend who was sitting with him in the bow-window of his rooms, idly watching the street below. Piccadilly is not considered to be the liveliest place in the world in the month of September, but he to whom the remark was made seemed to be so intent on the scene without, that some minutes elapsed before he replied.

"Six years! the future for which I longed six years ago did not seem to me more distant than that; and it is now further off than ever." The sigh which followed these words was too real for the occasional weariness of existence which we feel at five-and-twenty. I wish I could draw Harley Grey's face as it looked then; it would tell us more of the man within than many pages of homily. So fair, that it might

have been a girl's; the soft slight moustache shaded the delicate pencilling of a mouth whose severity of expression might have been Achilles' as he sat by the ships at Troy. The features were refined, almost to sharpness, and deep lines marked cheeks from which the bloom of vigorous health was absent. As he spoke, his eyes, which were of that deep violet hue which women love, glistened, and a hasty hand brushed the scant locks from his broad pale forehead.

"You are not the first, my dear fellow," his companion replied, "who has found himself perplexed with the problem of the past and the future; for my part, I have come to the conclusion that the past years of a man's life are well rid of, that the future is a concern beyond our daily necessities, and that the only true aim of existence is to realize the ever-enduring present." He rose, went to the table, and proceeded to light a cigar.

"It is very well for you, old boy, to talk in that strain," said Grey; "you have attained happiness, and are content to anchor *there*."

Berthon returned to the window, and a slight smile crossed his handsome features. There was a marked contrast between the two; although some years his friend's senior, Berthon looked like one who revelled in youth and strength; his face had not the care, but all the expression of Grey's; he stood some inches taller than him, and his well-fitting frock-coat showed to advantage his broad chest and powerful form. A certain care in his dress evidenced, perhaps, that he was sensible of this, and seemed, as he stood there, so different from the negligence that betrayed itself in the careless dress of Grey; but the latter would probably have felt a difficulty in breathing in his friend's

costume : such is the affinity betwixt a man's coat and his disposition.

"I will tell you a truth, Harley, which I have found out during the past six months ; you say I have found happiness ; I own that ; but you will learn that the very possession of long desired treasures creates the fearfulness of losing them again. You say, too, that I am contented to anchor now," he added, laughing ; "do you mean that Lilian Celadon will be such a weight on my life that I cannot go forward ; or, when did I tell you, Harley, that my ambition ended at the marriage altar ?"

"Ah, George," his companion replied, "like the rest, you will become used to the possession, and make light of what you once held to be the most sacred thing in man's existence ; a life within your own to cherish, and a heart which must beat with yours for ever."

"Form what opinion you will, my dear fellow, of my future character, but do not speak so sadly, or I shall begin to believe that you, too, have been captured by Lady Lilian ; the fact is, Harley, I cannot yet realize, although we are to be married so soon, that the events of the past year are not a dream—that I really possess her. It seems a happiness so great that to have it is almost a crime."

"You will see her to-night in her beauty," Harley said, after a pause, and as if he were recounting a vision, "and the sound of her voice will be the only music you will care for in the world. Do not let anything I say or feel, George, trouble you ; you know me too well to think that I would say one word to pain you, now that we shall part so soon. Forgive me, but I cannot help looking back, and thinking of the

many hours we have spent together, not in the gaiety of the world, but away from its noise." Again there came that deep tired sigh, and he continued, in a faltering voice, "it is not that I envy you—it would be cruel and wrong; you know how earnestly I hope for your happiness. It is only my selfishness, George, and it is good for me to have it wounded; I am a weight on every one; you will breathe freer when you have forgotten me a little. I know that your life will be successful and brilliant; I don't think I am quite strong enough for the world; I don't think I shall live long; it was only the thought of the vanity of life and the fleetness of the hopes we build upon that made me feel so low to-day. Is it not time for you to go?"

But Berthon was troubled, and did not reply. An expression of pain came over his face, and with his back to Harley, he remained stedfastly gazing out of the window, and the eyes, which the other saw not, glistened with an involuntary tear.

"Why do you not speak, George?" said Harley, laying his hand affectionately on his friend's shoulder.

"You should not dwell on the dark side of things so, Harley; you will live to laugh at this mournful philosophy of yours. Besides, my dear fellow, fortune is even with all of us at last."

"Even, indeed!" he replied bitterly, "will *he* tell you so who was born blind? But you know we always differed on this point; do not let us discuss it now. I want to talk of other things; where are you going for your holiday?"

"I heard from my uncle the other day: he has most kindly placed Ilceston at my disposal. We shall go there for a week or so, and on to Paris, I

think. I used to fancy that the only country for lovers was Italy, but I could not well go there without visiting *him*, and he has gone to Florence to be alone."

"Does he speak of his health at all?"

"No, he never does; he is probably better than he was when he left England."

"I wonder who are his companions there," said Harley.

"Some old chums of the last century philosophers, I should say. Did you see his article in the 'Saturday' last week, on 'Free Thought in Italy'? He had spent many hours in the colleges before he wrote that, I know. I wish the dear fellow were coming home again; he will make such a pet of my little woman."

"I thought he did not believe in woman's love."

"Did you?" said Berthon, with a smile. "Perhaps not in the market article, sold by that name. He will believe in Lilian when he sees her."

A glow of pride came over the features of the young man. He did not mark the long wistful look with which his friend was regarding him.

"Ah," said Grey, "you are right, George; we confess in the purpose of our lives what we deny every day. Is there a dream of future good, or of future fame, at the end of whose vista no woman's form flits? How hard we try to dissuade ourselves of the truth," he added. "I heard once a poetical friend of mine wax furious over Tennyson's poetry, declaring he taught that woman's love was the end and aim of existence. He was wrong in his judgment of the poet, but his speculative theories became very faint at the touch of a woman's hand."

"Women," said Berthon, "know half a truth, and

fashion it into a creed of their own. There is a love which is current among the marriage-makers, which most fools will give 'for a consideration;' but there are men who do not care for any passion that cannot rise to the height of their own ideal. Of men there are apes and fools enough, but they generally recognise the aristocracy of manhood; women would fain believe that the world of finesse and coquetry they live in is the empire over the hearts and lives of men which we concede to the few and the true among them. I know so many women, for whom I would undergo any trial, and for whose happiness I would undertake any task, that I am often ashamed to speak lightly of those I cannot honour, in consideration of those whom I so highly esteem."

"This is the first impartial sentiment on the subject you have uttered since you became engaged," replied Grey.

"Perhaps it is," said Berthon; "I shall have time and leisure to abuse the sex when I am tired of marriage fetters." He turned on his heel with a light laugh. "You will find 'Shelley' on the table behind you—I must dress. If you will wait ten minutes or so, we will walk to Grosvenor Square together." He disappeared within the adjoining room, and left his friend alone by the window. Harley took up the poet, but he had not turned a page before the book slipped on to his knees, and he leant his arm on the window-sill and gazed down the busy street, where the light of the lamps struggled with the orange glow of the fading west.

Berthon joined him shortly, and linking arm in arm, they strolled across the street, and vanished beneath the lamps of the Arcade.

CHAPTER II.

*"You are pictures out of doors,
Bells in your parlours, wild cats in your kitchens,
Saints in your injuries, devils being offended."*

OTHELLO.

IF a young man find that life is a monotony, let him marry, and the world will be changed. There can scarcely happen to him in his private life a more important event; the loss of the estate of liberty which he resigns is like the parting with great possessions, whilst the gain which he receives with her whom "he has chosen from the world" is beyond his present power to estimate. How uncertain, vague, and sweet is that possible future! He has called in his messengers running to and fro in the earth to inquire for love; he loses for a brief while the all-absorbing contemplation of the grave pursuits and purposes of his manhood; he drinks of a spring which for the first time in his life satisfies him with its reality; he feels the greatness of his nature; he consents to become a slave that he may win more abundant liberty. Men may henceforth say their say: he loves.

There has probably been written more about love than any other subject under heaven. We unconsciously sift the golden truths from the mass of conventional aphorisms and accumulated rubbish. I know not which be the easier, to move to tears or to laughter the human nature, according to the view we take of love. It is the basis of tragedy, and the life of a farce; at once the most sublime and the most comical of all the passions and sentiments we enter-

tain for our fellow-beings. It is well to find a harmless amusement in that which in other days may become our chief concern. It is said that the end and aim of an earthly career is the meet preparation for a higher existence hereafter. The compass of mens' desire within the present life is happiness ; and as love is the highest of all duties and exercises in its first and spiritual sense, so is its human type the most perfect exercise of the natural faculties. Let what pleasures and duties, toil and ambition follow thereon, nothing for the time shares that dominion in the heart of man, which is wielded by the passionate yearning and unwearied quest after the unselfishness, the sympathy, and the consolation of that knowledge that there exists in this wide world one human heart to cling to for ever.

On that same afternoon a party of girls were assembled in what had once been the school-room, but was now the library of Earl Celadon's house in Grosvenor Square. The tea-table appeared to have fulfilled its functions, the daylight was growing dim, and the fair idlers were sitting together, the books and needlework about which they had been engaged lying discarded, chatting gaily away the dying afternoon. It was chilly enough to necessitate a fire, and the eldest of the group was comfortably disposed in an easy chair, with her eyes closed, apparently dozing, toasting her toes on the fender ; this was the Lady Ernestine, the earl's only married daughter, a lady still in the first bloom of youth, whose experience of married life had not yet extended over a second year. On the fender-stool at her feet sat Violet Celadon, her youngest sister, a fair-haired child of nineteen, who having been deep in her book nearly all the after-

noon, was striving, by the aid of the firelight, to finish the story of "Tristram and Isolt," but whether the pathos of the story or the flicker of the flame had caused her soft eyes to fill with tears, I cannot say.

A little removed from these was a group of three girls engaged in a conversation not so earnest but that their laughter, light and gay, occasionally disturbed the serenity of the Lady Ernestine's countenance, who declared that it was impossible to get an hour's quiet among a parcel of such noisy children.

The chief offender in this respect was her sister Nora, who was apparently endeavouring to chase a shade of melancholy from the fair face of her by whose side she sat, and whose listless hand she fondly held in her own.

"Why, Lilian, what will George say if he finds you in low spirits to-night? O you little puss, you will be merry enough when he is here : you are acting the bride to cheat us all."

The smile broke over the sweet face, but she only replied with a kiss on her sister's upturned brow.

"Shall I give Mr. Berthon a private interview first, and tell him you have changed your mind?"

The last speaker was Marion Delessert, a young lady of Lilian Celadon's own age, who occupied that mysterious relationship of "her greatest friend" beyond the immediate circle of her own family. But Lilian's engagement was not so light a matter to her as she had been trying to make it out all the afternoon; and as her disposition was not over "matter-of-fact," it was not difficult to observe that she was more inclined to share her friend's gravity than to join in Nora's playful sallies.

"I am sure he would be very pleased to see you,"

said Lilian, "only there might be a little drawback to your confidences."

"What would that be?"

"He would not believe a word you said."

"Nonsense," said Nora; "you don't imagine, you silly child, that men are capable of such knightly trust in these days. George would listen to anyone who could prove to him that you were a heartless little flirt. You know you are not considered to be capable of a rational judgment for the next six months."

"I wish *I* were not," said Marion, with a sigh that provoked Nora's laughter.

"You two girls," she continued, "are just cut out for the doleful heroines of two novels. I can fancy this child finding out that George is the most ordinary of mortals, and telling him so indignantly every time he prefers a cigar to her company, or tells her he's sick of being petted; and as for you, Marion, you will become 'Mariana in the Moated Grange,' dying slowly of grief that you are not permitted to make a fool of yourself to some worthless specimen of humanity."

"I shall not," cried Marion, quite hurt. But Lady Lilian only smiled.

Lord Celadon's daughters had the reputation of being beautiful; if faultless forms and faultless features could give them a title to be called so, we may accept the verdict society had given; but as there are some girls who never seem to understand any number of compliments, none of the sisters, excepting, perhaps, Lady Ernestine, seemed conscious that they were admired more than the crowd of beautiful women their position caused them to mix with when in London. "You see, my dear, we loved them too well to teach them this

consciousness," the countess would say, when some one spoke of it to her. There was in this simple remark of hers contained a secret, the knowledge of which might change the face of society ; but though "knowledge comes" "wisdom lingers," and the coquette will be the mother of coquettes as long as the world lasts, and there are women fools enough to barter happiness for a disappointing dream, and men to be found to be bought and sold for a woman's smile.

Nora and Lilian were nearly of the same age, Lilian being about a year the younger. Her hair, which was coiled in glossy braids upon her small finely-shaped head, was several shades lighter than her sister's dark and profuse tresses ; she was fairer in complexion, too ; but here the difference seemed to end. Both had the same dark hazel eyes fringed with such lashes as give a soul to a face ; many a boyish lover had owned the equal fascination of their sweet depths. But men stood more in awe of Nora ; she covered lovers with confusion and flatterers with ridicule ; beautiful woman that she was, she seemed to despise a tender feeling, and the impossibility of flirting with her was felt by those who owned the inimitable grace with which she could make an absurdity of the most earnest devotion to herself. Lilian's was a nature the softer than her elder sister's that it was perhaps the less capable of any great passion ; her betrothed lover knew this, but he felt, he said, the greater trust in his possession of a young and guileless heart which he could guide as he would, and teach the strange knowledge of imperishable love. Lilian had been the idol of many hearts from a child ; she seemed to attain to womanhood before her sisters : it was a certain fact

that she was so unconscious of her rare beauty as to wonder why she was admired. She loved Nora tenderly, and their approaching separation for the first time in life cast over both a shade which perhaps she felt the more, inasmuch as she knew that Nora could not be partaker in her peculiar happiness.

In the pause which succeeded Marion's refutation of the charge of sentimentality, Violet Celadon had laid down her book and seated herself at Lilian's feet.

"How many bridesmaids have you decided on?" said Marion Delessert.

"Only six."

"Only six!" exclaimed Lady Ernestine, "how could you be so foolish as to spoil the whole look of the thing; you ought to have twelve."

"George wished it," replied Lilian, meekly.

"You should not have given in to him; men always have some ridiculous notion or other which ruins a wedding; I would rather not be married than only have six bridesmaids."

"Why did he wish it?" asked Violet, who had laid her head in Lilian's lap.

"He said he wished it not to be such a terribly grand affair, if it could be helped; he told mamma all about it, and she agreed with him; I think he felt that his position did not require it."

"So I should imagine!" her elder sister replied; but it was too dark for anyone to see the slight curl of her dainty little lip.

Lilian said nothing, but continued to toy with the fair locks on Violet's forehead.

"Go to sleep, Ness, and don't talk rubbish," said Nora, coming to the rescue, "you would be glad enough to be one yourself, if you could; and, as it is,

you flirt with George ten times more than with your own husband."

Ernestine laughed, being really too good-natured to take offence, if not sympathetic enough to conceal her opinion that her sister was not making a sufficiently brilliant match ; although " he certainly was a charming man."

Nora had brought a saucer of flowers from the table and was amusing herself with sticking them into Lilian's hair, Ophelia-wise.

" You jolly little bride," she said, kissing her after the operation. " I wish I were George, I should love you so !

" Is it finally decided that you are to have Ilceston?" Marion asked.

" Yes, I believe so ; don't you think it a very nice arrangement, Nora ?"

" Very, indeed," said that young lady, with a mock sigh, " how rum you will feel all alone with him in that big lonely castle of a place !"

The colour mounted into Lilian's cheeks.

" What in the world will you do all day?" she continued relentlessly, " sit on a crag like two gulls and listen to the sea booming?"

" Don't !" said Miss Delessert, " I think it's very wrong to turn these things into ridicule."

But Lady Nora's merry laugh was proof against Marion's expression of awe.

" What things, lovers and gulls?" she said, quite delighted to have roused her friend's " principles" as she called them.

" Ask Ness," suggested Violet, " she knows all about it."

" Or ought to," added Nora, " in those five weeks at

Ryde and Castle Chase, whence she returned sick of my Lord Dick, as most of the disappointed ones; weren't you darling?" this last appeal to the lady herself was quite Nora's style, and was followed by the usual kiss on Ness's white forehead.

"It is not right of you to say such things, Nora," she said, without, however, opening her eyes, "I shall tell Dick to cease giving you bracelets."

"That would be unkind and wicked, if you like, Ness; but what would men do without their wives' sisters, to have some fun with? Now I appreciate a bracelet from Richard much more than you do; it would be cruelty to animals—husbands I mean—to prevent him giving us presents, wouldn't it, girls?"

"Now Nora, do come and sit down; I have lots of things to talk to you about, and the dressing bell will ring in twenty minutes." Nora obeyed Lilian's appeal, and they forthwith entered upon a discussion of the presents and trousseau, into which it would be simply impossible to follow them.

"Are the Fiennes coming to the wedding?" said Ernestine, after a silent endurance of the "dresses" for some time.

"I hope not," said Violet.

"Why, child?"

Nora explained. "The Hon. Maurice is too assiduous in his attentions to Vi."

"You mean to yourself, Nora," Marion gravely suggested.

"He is very handsome, so I hope he *is*," was Lady Ness's reply.

"I don't think George gets on very well with him, does he, Lilian?" said Nora.

"George hardly knows him, I think."

"Is he jealous?" asked Miss Delessert.

"Impossible!" returned Nora, this time quite honestly; "fancy comparing the two together—Diogenes to Antinous!" and she laughed cruelly.

"How absurd of you, Nora," said Ernestine, "when so many people rave about him; he dances beautifully."

Nora knew that it was dangerous ground to say much of the gentleman in question, whose attentions to her indeed had been rather marked that season, so she took refuge in the conversation which Lilian and Violet was carrying on in a low tone behind her.

"You won't forget her, will you?"

"No," said Vi, "but I am afraid I shall never be able to get on with them like you."

"Get on with whom?" asked Nora.

"Vi is going to take my district when I am gone," said Lilian.

"I hope mamma won't allow it," interposed the Lady Ness in a tone of most confident wisdom.

"Poor Vi, she shall do as she likes," said Nora, "I shall go with her myself, I think; what fun you and I had Lilian, that day we fled from the sweep in the mews!"

Lady Ernestine shuddered visibly.

"Do come, dearest," said Marion Delessert, who was striving heroically to check a wilful tear at the thought of Lilian being no longer associated with her in plodding about the little back streets, in the old grey cloak, on Thursdays, "it will be so nice to meet, and you get on with the people so capitally."

"I will, if I may choose my own houses and families, on experience," returned Miss Nora. "I have a

peculiar aversion to be asked to be kissed—blessed, I mean, by very religious old women.”

“Old humbugs!” remarked Lady Ness as a parenthesis.

Lilian laughed, and Marion looked as if something had happened. Violet sprang up and threw her arms round Nora’s neck.

“You will, darling? how sweet of you!” she exclaimed, “you shan’t have to kiss anyone but your own Vi, and there’s not a single sweep now in our district!”

At that moment the door opened and the servant announced Mr. Berthon.



CHAPTER III.

*“And what unto them is the world beside,
With all its change of time and tide?”* BYRON.

IF you want to estimate a man’s character rightly, it is said, you must see him at home; I doubt whether even then you would form a correct judgment, if indeed we ever do under any circumstances—until you had observed him in the society of women. It may be that everyone is more or less an actor; it is certain that we assume, whether voluntarily or not, different phases of conduct and disposition, according to the society in which we find ourselves. Some men have learnt demeanour as an aptitude; with them it becomes hypocrisy. I have seen a man of mature years alter his gait and expression of face without design on passing a ladies’ school in the street; this is weakness, but nature is weak,

However this be, it is probably true that the presence of woman confounds the mean, the nervous and the timid nature ; possibly no one is perfectly at ease in the company of beauty but the true gentleman.

George Berthon joined the circle with the confidence of one who felt himself welcome and at home. He smiled as he took Ernestine's hand, for that lady had not contemplated such a sudden intrusion of the other sex, and was instinctively mindful that the back of her comfortable chair had left an impression upon her *coiffure*. Lilian's face brightened with a proud smile ; she was always proud of him among her sisters. Lady Nora's eyes were a sufficient ordeal for any man of the lover genus, but she never felt her power when she met the steady open gaze of that pure handsome face. He kissed Lilian lightly on the forehead, and bowed to Miss Delessert, who only knew him slightly, and who felt her heart beat quicker when the knight of her friend's dreams and conversations was by.

Violet slipped out of the room for reasons best known to herself ; and Berthon found himself, as is generally the case, under the necessity of renewing the fallen conversation.

"Harley Grey walked here with me," he said, "I should have brought him in had it not been so late."

"I wish you had," Lilian replied, "I wanted you to introduce him before—before the day."

"But you know him well, all of you."

"Not Marion," she said, with a slight constraint.

"Where does he live ?" asked Lady Nora.

"And what *is* he ?" added Ernestine, with peculiar emphasis.

"He lives in——Street, near Russell Square, and is a lawyer," answered Berthon, with a smile.

"Oh!" and therewith Lady Ness relapsed into silence.

"He is of good family, George, is he not?" said Lilian.

"With heaps of money?" suggested Nora.

Berthon laughed outright. "Well, I am sure his ears must burn; you ought to find out these things from himself. I believe he is of very good family, but I don't think they are at all rich."

"It's only fair we should know all about him," said Lady Nora, "as you wish us to ask him here."

"I thought you would like him," Berthon added hastily; "he is very amusing and a thorough gentleman."

"So are many men," Ernestine remarked, who knew however, that she could not draw a retort from Lilian's lover.

"He seems to me to be in low spirits, when he is not talking," said Nora. "Lilian thinks he is not in very good health."

"Perhaps he works very hard," suggested Miss Delessert, who held that romance was inseparable from a pale brow.

"He does," replied Berthon, anxious to change the subject, "but that anyone is ever in low spirits in your company, Lady Nora, I should imagine to be simply impossible—is it not so?"

"I don't know," she replied, laughing, "but, Mr. Berthon, will you please to remember that hardly anything is yet arranged for the 1st, and half rest with yourself to see about?"

"Well," he said, "I am open to commands and conviction in case of differences; suppose you begin the list."

"Very well, Sir ; first of all, you will have to kiss all the bridesmaids, isn't that so, Lilian ?"

"I hope it is," he answered for her. "I shall be very happy to obey implicitly."

Marion Delessert flushed scarlet, and Lilian called him to order. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, George !" she said.

"Why don't you pull his hair ?" suggested Nora, delighted. Lilian was not quite sure whether she would have dared such a familiarity, and it would have been rather a feat too, for her lover was not short, and he was standing up against the fireplace stroking his moustache with the air of an amused Titan.

"What have you been doing with yourself all day, Mr. Berthon ?"

"You are ironical this evening, Lady Nora, or you have forgotten my own name ; most of the day has been spent in thinking of the evening."

"Nonsense ! that's how all engaged men talk ; I dare say you have not once thought of us."

"I shall certainly not repeat the compliment," he said.

"Now George, tell the truth at once," she persisted. "You have been wandering about Piccadilly with a friend and an atrocious cigar, talking politics, and abusing women."

"You consider the two synonymous, then ?"

"Perhaps ; I know all politicians hate women, or they would not be so slow when they are with them."

"At all events," he replied, "I wish my time permitted of such agreeable occupations ; I did not leave the Temple till late."

"Well, I am sure, Sir," said Lady Ness, "you confess that abusing us is an agreeable occupation ?"

"Not exactly; I spoke of Piccadilly, the atrocious cigars, and politics. I know nothing about women."

"Why do you marry then?" said Lilian.

"To find out something," he replied, gravely fixing his eye upon her sweet face, while the other girls laughed.

"I wish you would ask us again to lunch with you some day," suggested Ernestine. "I think you are ashamed of your luxurious quarters."

"You pay me a great compliment," he replied. "I assure you it took me and my friends a long time to make that old room even respectable; if you could see it now you would wonder what human being spent his days there; still, if you care to come, you have only to send yourself the invitation, which I should scarcely presume to take upon myself the honour of supposing you would accept if it came from me; more especially as you bring the luxury with you."

"That's not bad," said Lady Nora, "if it were not quite so conventional, Mr. Berthon; but I should like to walk through those quiet ugly old courts again, and tumble about those awful bundles of papers; how angry it made you, I remember?"

"You behaved very badly," said Lilian, "and don't deserve to go again."

"Never mind, child, I was a 'luxury' and could do as I liked. I have got to run away now," she added, observing that Ness was moving towards the door; "do tell me first, Mr. Berthon, whether you have composed your speech yet?"

"What speech?"

"The wedding speech of course; do let me write one for you!"

"I have not yet thought of anything so awful," he replied.

"Don't tell stories; I know you will sit up three nights over it. I will write you one for a box of gloves which shall make Lilian wish she were inside the wedding cake!" With which speech she vanished, and they could hear her silvery laugh as she tripped gaily up the stairs.

The lovers found themselves alone.

Lady Lilian stood at the fireplace, leaning her cheek upon her hand, and tapped her little foot musingly on the edge of the fender, whilst for some seconds Berthon quietly surveyed her downcast eyes. The familiarity that amounts to indifference, which we so often observe between the man and woman whose days of betrothal are as a dim remembrance of their married life, strikes us as something painful and disappointing when we involuntarily contrast it with the strange and wondrous spell that seems to surround the days of first love; who would not exchange years of that after existence for the renewal of some hours of the spring time of life! Is it that the knowledge of the things behind the veil, the weaknesses and the follies, nay the sins—of that being whom we single from the world as the one we could most honour and most love, gradually levels the dreams of a wistful imagination, and makes that common place which once seemed so ethereal? Sorrow following on the footsteps of Knowledge waters with her tears the seeds her sister sowed. Yet not less bright, not less happy, is the dream of the golden days.

It was George who first broke the silence; he took the hand which hung free, in his own, and said

"The time is very near now, Lilian; do you fear it?"

"No, George," she replied, raising her eyes to his, "but I should like it to be over."

"Poor child, I know the anxiety and excitement must be trying; but these things must be, and it pleases others, Lilian. I really begin to feel like a criminal that is about to rob someone of his greatest treasure; will your father and mother and Nora ever forgive me, do you think?"

"I hope so," she said, with a sweet smile, "it seems so long between the times I see you, George; when shall you get away from work altogether?"

"In a few days. If you knew how incessantly I think of you and yours, darling, in those hours when I cannot be here, you would think I was altogether 'gone,' as Nora would say. The fact is, little one, I get anxious now, when I miss you, and I want to have you with me always; do you think you will ever get tired of me?" he added, taking her fair face between his hands, and gazing so earnestly into the clear depths of her trustful eyes. A brilliant flush mounted into her face, and a happy tear trembled on her silken lashes; she replied with a voice that deep and tender emotion caused to tremble,

"O George, how can you ask me! you know that I love you better than all the world!"

Lovers' kisses, common as air, mean but momentary blisses; but if there is any truth in man or woman, the kiss of these young and happy lovers then was the seal of vows they thought would live for ever. A calm and holy faith in the unseen and unknown future is the only guerdon we can give to her whose maiden lips first plead with us for love.

"I did you wrong, darling," he said, "you will have to forgive me many things when you know me more.

The fact is, child, I scarcely believe that you are altogether mine ; it seems so strange. I am not worthy of you, Lilian—I feel I am not,” he added, in unsteady tones, “my life has been so narrow and so selfish ; until I saw you and knew you, I did not know what it was to live ; you will teach me the first lessons of a higher and nobler life, Lilian ; will you not ?”

But in moments like these, when the reserve, the calm self-possession, and if I may so say, the half-conscious superiority of the man melted away under the influence of his great love for her, Lady Lilian could not find in herself the strength to take up what he laid down. She seemed to tremble at the knowledge of her own kingdom, and could only fling her arms round his neck and murmur in broken accents as she hid her burning face upon his breast,

“O, George, darling, you frighten me when you say these things ; how can I teach you anything ?—I am so weak and foolish, and you so strong and wise ; let me love you and help you a little, dearest, and I shall be so very very happy !”

More eloquent than a thousand words was the silence that followed. He only drew her closer to him, as if with those strong arms to sever her from all the world indeed. A great and calm sense of happiness seemed to fill his soul, the unspeakable joy of knowing that one of God’s fairest and best creatures so loved him as to merge her life and being into his own for evermore.

There are moments in life when the satisfaction of man is so complete that it were merciful to loosen the silver cord which binds to earth, and to free the prisoned soul for ever, before the light fades and the consciousness of common things wakes again.

Berthon was the first to speak.

"I had nearly forgotten, Lilian," he said, "that I have a present for you; I want you to wear it to-night."

"I wish you would not give me so many presents, George; I have such a lot already; Nora says I ought to give half of them to her. Why do you give me presents?" she asked, with the ingenuousness which so often startled her lover.

"Because I am selfish, I suppose, darling; and I am so proud of my little bride. Besides, you are going to be sacrificed, child, and victims should always be decked with jewels and flowers. Do you mean to say you would rather not have them?"

"No, not exactly; I do not mind them from other people, because then they belong to us both; but there are many other things I like better from you, George!"

"I believe you, Lilian; but kisses are not so lasting as pearls, are they?"

Whether or no, her sweet lips were sealed by his own so effectually that she could not reply; a little laugh was the only response she made. Her lover lit the lamp that stood upon the table, and drew a case from his pocket.

"It is only a locket," he said, "which I should have given you long ago, but they had to make it for me, and you know I am difficult to satisfy."

Lilian smiled; she knew he was so, and stood, with one hand lightly laid upon his shoulder, to see what his fancy had been, while he unclasped the case and held the jewel in the light of the lamp.

The locket was oval, of smooth softly-chased gold; upon one side was a large cross in pearls of singular

whiteness and brilliancy, and upon the other when he turned it round, the monogram in relief of the beautiful Greek 'ΑΕΙ.

George laid it in the little open hand that trembled slightly as she took it.

"How exquisite! how lovely!" she exclaimed, "O George, how could you——"

"If you like it darling, I am satisfied," he said, interrupting her, "it is very simple, and nothing for anybody to rave about. I thought at first I should like to have your own name in the place of the monogram, but I had a fancy for the 'ΑΕΙ, and could not design one bringing in both, without destroying its simplicity."

"Why did you fancy the monogram particularly? though I like it myself better," she said, "you told me it meant 'for ever and ever,' didn't you?"

"You may translate it so," he replied.

"It is so kind of you, George; I don't deserve these lovely things; how pure and beautiful the cross is; I do so love pearls!"

Let me see it on to-night; I do not care to look at it except when it is in its proper place, asleep in my little dove's breast." He had a way of saying common things with that tenderness of expression which entrances the ear of women; and yet, as if to shatter the spell he was almost ashamed to use, he would follow it with a laugh. But Lilian could not join in it then; she seemed lost in thought.

"I am fond of crosses," she said, after a pause, "they seem to me to suggest thoughts of their own, when you look at them."

A momentary shade passed over her lover's face.

"Lilian," he said, taking both her hands in his own

and gazing wistfully into her fair face, where strange and wildly sweet emotions chased their transient flushes, as if he would fain read the pure heart within, "I will tell you why I chose the cross; it is the emblem of that beautiful and holy faith which has brought the world out of darkness into light; but unlike the objects of that faith which to us weak mortals are so infinitely sublime and inimitable, the earthly things to which we cling for consolation here below are as changing and unstable as ourselves. I cannot tell you in human language, Lilian, how much I love you, but if you ever ask yourself in the future, by reason of my weakness or folly, whether I really spoke truly to you before I bound you to myself by irrevocable vows—if ever a day should come when you could doubt me, child, even for a moment, promise me you will chase away the thought I could not bear to think of—promise me you will believe me, if only by recalling my words, Lilian—by looking at that locket?"

But her face was hidden on his shoulder; he did not care for any answer but the throbbing of the heart he held within his arms, like a little fluttering bird within its prison.

"Ah! Lilian," he said, "we are not always what we would be, and we have yet to learn the world together. If those poor pearls are white, let your own thoughts be pure, and believe me, my darling, that as the gold will last which forms the letters of that old Greek word, I who hold you dearer ten thousand times than life, will endeavour to be as true to you for ever."

Simple words will sometimes lull all passions to a trance. When he ceased, and the sound of his voice died away, she did not care to speak, nor to move.

He gently raised her drooping head, and kissed her burning cheeks.

"Go and shew it to your mother," he said, "and tell her that the miniature inside is herself."



CHAPTER IV.

*"She is most fair, and thereunto
Her life doth rightly harmonize;
Feeling or thought that was not true
Nè'er made less beautiful the blue
Unclouded heaven of her eyes.*

*"She is a woman : one in whom
The spring time of her childish years
Hath never lost its first perfume
Though knowing well that life hath room
For many blights and many tears."*

J. R. LOWELL.

WHEN Berthon entered the drawing room he found the whole party assembled, with the exception of Lilian and her mother. Lord Celadon stepped forward and wrung his hand with affectionate warmth.

"We have had an agreeable surprise this evening," he said, "in the unexpected arrival of my wife's cousin, Maurice Fienne, whom of course you know by name, and to whom I must introduce you."

Berthon cast his eye on the group of men who stood round the hearth, and as the person alluded to was the only stranger to him among them, he had no difficulty in singling him out. He was a young man of about his own age, not above the middle height, dark, spare, and rather sallow ; the ladies pronounced him handsome, perhaps on account of his prominent

finely-shaped features, black flashing eyes, and the heavy moustache which concealed a stern and determined mouth. He was at the moment talking in a low voice to Nora, a fact which was being observed with evident satisfaction by Lady Ernestine, who, occupying the centre ottoman in the full glory of mauve satin and point lace, was opening and shutting her fan with the nonchalance she displayed when her thoughts were elsewhere. If the gentleman who was addressing her imagined that the immovable smile on her beautiful face was a tribute to his amusing remarks, he must have had little experience of lovely women. The individual, indeed was none other than the Right Hon. Stuart Corrence, member for B———, and an old political colleague of the Conservative peer's, at whose house he was a constant visitor. His hair, or what remained of it, was white, though he was probably not above fifty, and his face wore the unmistakable expression of acuteness and good-humoured self-satisfaction of one who had worked at the political fabric for a quarter of a century, been a member of three unsuccessful administrations, and who was still convinced that the colours he had never deserted was the only banner under which the advocates of true freedom could possibly fight.

At the mention of Berthon's name, Mr. Fienne turned, and cast a quick and inquiring glance at the face of the stranger, with perhaps that pardonable curiosity we all of us more or less evince on our first introduction to one of whom we have heard much but have never seen. He was taken with the ease and frankness of Berthon's manner, who spoke of the pleasure it was to him to know so near a relation of the family of which he was so soon to become a member, and he

reciprocated with a slight hesitation of manner a similar sentiment.

Mr. Fienne was a man who had been born and bred in the atmosphere of political life. He was the eldest son and heir presumptive of Lord Fienne, of St. Ivors, Lingwoodshire, one of the great Liberal politicians of the day; and since his cousin was the wife of a Conservative peer, he naturally felt some restraint in being a visitor at his house; not on family grounds, for he was sincerely attached to the Celadons, so much as on account of the delicacy of his connection and friendship with the men of party whom he was sure to meet there. Though only slightly informed of George Berthon's political views, he knew that the man to whom his cousin was about to be united was a rising member of his profession, of considerable abilities, and, what was of still more significance, that they were likely very shortly to be thrown more together, from the fact that the house in the country which the young married couple were to occupy was in close proximity to his father's seat. He was curious to see the man on whom the Earl had bestowed his daughter's hand, since Berthon was not, to his knowledge, allied to any noble family, nor even the possessor of a large fortune. Lord Celadon himself, was connected, in his mind, with every aristocratic prejudice, and this alliance for a child of his, whom he so dearly loved, and who was so universally admired as Lady Lilian, was the most inexplicable, as it was, in his conjecture, the most democratic step, the Earl had lent himself to in his life.

The Earl himself stood by, interested in seeing how the two young men got on together; but he failed to pierce the cold well-trained courtesy of his cousin any more than he could understand the quiet ease with

which his son-in-law entered into conversation with him.

Besides those I have enumerated, there were present in the room the earl's two sons, Lord Eustace and Lord Aubrey. Eustace, the eldest, was a handsome likeness of his father; he was nearly two years older than his sister Ernestine, and had but recently returned from a lengthened tour abroad, after having completed his academical career at Oxford, where he had considerably distinguished himself. A young man of a generous and noble disposition, he had not yet lost, in his contest with the world, the frank and impulsive propensities of youth, and had conceived a warm friendship for Berthon, which was as affectionately reciprocated. Aubrey was yet a boy, not unlike his brother, but with Lady Violet's fair hair and his mother's tender eyes; he was the youngest member of the family, and was, at the present time, home for a few days from Harrow. Miss Delessert had engaged him in close conversation, and was doing her best to extort an impossible confession from him that he ever wrote poetry.

When I have mentioned Miss de Gex, a single lady, and an old friend of the family's, who was then staying on a visit with them, and the gentleman to whom she was expatiating on the imperfect state of women's education, the reader will have been introduced to everyone present that evening.

The gentleman in question deserved certainly a prior notice, since he was Ernestine's husband, the veritable 'Lord Dick,' from whom, an hour before, Nora had so narrowly run the risk of receiving no more bracelets.

The Earl of Assis and Doorme was one of the long

list of human beings in this work-a-day world of ours whose noble names would seem to have out-lived their nobility. It may very possibly be that nobility of character, which most certainly first created nobility of blood, has begun again to usurp the first place in the minds of men. Now this particular peerage on the roll dated from a time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, as the treatises have it ; it was lost in the mist of distance, so that the lineal descendants could boast of their ancestry, whether or no its first representative earned the distinction by dagger, treason, servility, or actual nobility of service, in battle or in peace.

The present earl had a long rent-roll, and a genial disposition ; he was a good practical farmer, and had contributed much information to Royal Commissions on cattle diseases and grain manures ; but he could boast that he had never wasted the time of the legislature, nor his own, with word or pen. Moreover, his fair domains lay contiguous to the Celadon estates, and as he had one only son, Lord Richard, a good-humoured, lazy fellow, who loved the field more than the study, and the whirr of pheasants better than London wheels, it was natural that the early acquaintance of the youthful members of both families should, in fulness of time, ripen into an alliance. It was impossible to deny that the old gentleman was very estimable, and quite lavish in his affection for his nieces, as he insisted on calling Lady Celadon's daughters ; he was proud of his one son, for his steadiness and stoical mediocrity ; and, be it said, Viscount Poitiers, as he was by courtesy termed, alias Dick, knew how to dress well, and to win the hearts of ladies, no mean accomplishments in a prosaic age.

Thus it was that a tacit understanding arose that he should be at liberty to pay his addresses to any one of the earl's daughters he fancied most ; and the young man soon yielded to the fascination of the eldest, who was undeniably beautiful, and reputed brilliant, and certainly possessed brains enough for the two in all ordinary circumstances of life. It would be out of place here to pursue any further a critical inquiry either into the mental acquirements, pursuits, or married life of the last of the Poictiers ; suffice it is to say, that he had neither ruined his fortune in horse-racing, nor as yet broken his fair young wife's heart, and we shall have distinguished him sufficiently for our purpose from the rank and file of his contemporaries.

He was not sorry to be released from the philosophical queries of Miss de Gex by the arrival of the countess and Lady Lilian, and the simultaneous announcement of dinner, which assigned to him the charge and conduct of his charming sister-in-law Violet, to whom he said, with the most perfect *sang-froid*, he was *almost* as much attached as he was to his own wife. Lady Poictiers understood the 'almost,' and was quite satisfied that his attentions should have other objects than herself.

"We should be so miserable if we only cared for each other," she would say ; and Nora's ideas upon the same subject were said to coincide, at least up to the point where brotherly affection resolved itself by a natural process into bracelets.

"Your mother looks as young as her daughters," observed Berthon to Lord Eustace, as the Countess came towards them.

"She *is*, I believe," he replied, with a smile, for he was proud of his mother.

Seeing that great painters fail at times to reproduce for us the lineaments of faces we dearly love, how should anyone essay to draw fair features in words ?

It was as impossible to know Lady Celadon without seeing her, as to be with her without loving her. To say that she was a beautiful woman, whose charms the envious years had failed to depreciate, and whose disposition the cares of life had been unable to sour,—that she regarded her husband as the centre and pivot of her world, and had, whilst lavishing upon him woman's tenderest affections from the inexhaustible springs of a noble and loving nature, brought up her children, amid the glitter and temptations of an illustrious position, secure from and undefiled by the hollow vanities of a society as effete as its allurements were deceptive, and yet had never failed in her respectabilities towards it, nor lost for them one advantage worth retaining; to say that she had done this as it were without an effort, from the pure love and instinct of what was best for his satisfaction, and conform to his lofty principles in the high place he occupied, as well as most for their enduring happiness; to say that she was universally admired and beloved, as few are in this world, is to give no idea to those who never knew her friendship, of the ineffable sweetness of a manner and disposition that charmed, as much by its gentle courtesy, as its intense human sympathy and kindness. Praise of any degree to Lady Celadon might overlook her failings, but could scarcely exaggerate the fascination she exercised. If to have passed through fleet and brilliant years as the worshipped beauty of gay and giddy throngs, and to have preserved a pure and guileless heart whilst bearing away its palm, to have rightly appreciated the

stern and noble qualities of a great and severe nature like her husband's, to have added to the lustre of a statesman's name, and to have bound her children to her and him by indissoluble ties of affection and honour, was a woman's mission and work we seldom find, we might the less hesitate whether we have overstated her due than lest we had detracted from her claims. Had the earl not played so important a part in public affairs, and been thrown amid the stirring and discordant elements of busy political life and action ; had he been less of a worker, and more of an enthusiast, it is possible that he might have weighed down the delicately-adjusted balance between his wife's affectionate ministry and his own strong nature. If we never found in the life-long search the types of human virtues, we should fall away from the true standards of worth in our appreciation of men and women. The adulation of the world's great ones is mischievous, because they are not really great ; but to deny honour where it is due is to silence the best and most generous impulses of the human heart.

When Maurice Fienne's eyes fell upon Lilian he felt an indefinable sensation rise in his breast ; perhaps it was only involuntary admiration of her beauty, for, although he denied it, he was subject to its most subtle influences ; but surprise, and the least touch of envy lay underneath. He met her smile with one equally careless, and began to wonder why he did not particularly like Berthon. The locket which glittered on her white neck, suspended by its blue velvet, was the immediate object of everybody's attention.

"I can plainly see," said her father, as he drew her towards him with a fond kiss, "that George is quite

spoiling her. Ah, my darling, by-and-bye it will be the other way : is it not so, Ness ?”

“Not in my case, papa,” replied that lady, with the most cruel grin at poor Dick.

“A girl’s engagement is her only holiday in life,” Fienne remarked, glancing at Berthon who stood by, too happy to note the possible insinuation.

“That is to say, if you had your way, Mr. Fienne,” said a ringing voice in his ear, and Lady Nora looked as if she meant it.

“These young people can either make love or abuse each other with impunity,” said Stuart Corrence to the countess, as she took his arm, for the earl insisted on sending the young men to shift for themselves among the younger ladies, and had led the way down stairs with his married daughter.

“I think they would find perfect harmony impossible very long,” she replied ; “but Nora always does hurt herself if she can against Maurice’s wise sayings.”

Fienne was inclined to question in his own mind the old gentleman’s right to take Lady Celadon down, but as Viscount Poitiers seemed very contented with his sister-in-law Violet, who looked as charming as radiant nineteen can in a cloud of white muslin and a blue sash ; he, too, forgot his etiquette in the satisfaction of finding Nora herself assigned to him. Lord Eustace took charge of Miss de Gex, and Aubrey fell to Marion Delessert, whose lively imagination went a good way towards supposing herself Lady Lilian, and her youthful partner the happy lover, and in this order the whole party migrated down stairs.

“Well, Maurice, what do you think of him now you

have seen him?" was Lady Nora's opening fire on her cousin, who seemed unusually silent, and to be thinking of nothing but his soup.

"Think of whom—Mr. Berthon?"

"Whom do you suppose?" she said.

Fiennie thought it time to answer.

"Very nice fellow, I should think."

"Good-looking?"

"I am no judge."

"You imagined you were, upstairs."

"Did I? O yes, but that was—of women," he added, carelessly.

"I shall be better able to appreciate your criticisms next time," she replied. Had she not been concentrating all her attention on a doomed *pâté*, she might have observed his brows knit, for he had been paying her some very fairly worded compliments on the sofa in the drawing-room.

"There are faces which it requires no judge to pronounce beautiful," he replied, after a moment's silence.

"Those are generally seen in a looking-glass, I suppose, Mr. Fiennie."

"If you like," he said; "you probably speak from experience?"

"Of course," she retorted, with features immovable as they were fair.

Fiennie glanced across the table at the white houlders and glowing face of Lady Lilian, who seemed to have no ear for any voice but his who sat near to her, and he drew a rapid mental contrast between the status of that singing bird when trapped and its mocking notes in the chase. Lady Nora, who was sufficiently versed in sighs to know that his short

suppressed one was not feigned, asked him what he was thinking about.

"You would not care to know," he said.

"You are right," she replied, with a conciliatory smile, and began a conversation with Mr. Corrence.

The longest dinners come to an end, and just as Richard Poictiers had explained to Violet the latest novelty in the orange-peeling line, the very last item of his conversational stock, Lady Celadon rose.

Miss Delessert was quite satisfied that Lord Aubrey's dark blue eyes were following her graceful and slender form out of the room, and was deaf to Miss de Gex's animated query whether she did not think her friend Lilian looked like a queen of fairyland that night.

When the gentlemen found themselves alone, the conversation turned, I am afraid, upon very uninteresting subjects. Berthon removed to a chair next the earl, and endeavoured to keep a grave countenance of attention whilst his right honourable friend described to them both the great anti-republican federation he had been the means of setting on foot that week amid the fervent politicians of the borough of which he was the local god and king. He seemed to think that it was a good opportunity of instilling sound constitutional doctrines into the ears of young Mr. Fienne, who, although apparently engaged in a conversation upon the best breed of retrievers with the happily neutral Dick Poictiers, cast furtive glances at the unconscious Corrence, the diabolical significance of which the latter would have shuddered to behold. Neither Lord Eustace's quasi-sceptical queries, nor Berthon's friendly irony had the least effect in moderating the tone of the great legislator, until the earl himself

him that he was the best practical joker he had ever met.

"And I should think," his lordship added, with his blandest smile, "that my friend Fienne would have been as much amused as yourself at the success of the affair. Fill your glass, Stuart, and tell me what you think of that Teniers behind you; I bought it last week only."

Maurice turned towards the great Organizer and said, with the quiet sarcasm which he knew how to associate with the most courteous manner—

"I certainly admire, sir, your thoughtfulness for your constituents; it was a pity, should they grow weary even of the federation, in your absence, that you did not suggest to them the formation of a committee to get up a subscription statue to Mumbo Jumbo in the market-place." It was sufficient for the speaker that the hearty laugh of Berthon and Eustace, in which the earl himself joined, was against poor Corrence. That gentleman, who, with his glasses upon his authoritative nose—that organ whose haughty and defiant sniff had caused committees to quail—was standing beneath the new Teniers preparing for the criticism expected from him, turned upon Fienne a look of intense surprise and scorn, but he did not possess the genius of retort, and suffered himself to be soothed into his good-natured importance again by his opponent himself, who inquired of him information of the great painter as if he had never heard his name.

It has been asserted by ladies that the interregnum after dinner in the drawing-room is a source of much gratification to them. It may generally be observed that the speaker is youthful; moreover, that she

makes the remark to some monster of the opposite sex, with whom, however, she is not above a flirtation, and it may safely be considered by that individual that his fair Diana has not yet passed out of the regions where the female dignity is best upheld by a consistently expressed contempt for him and his kind. However this may be, there was more than one in the drawing-room that evening who wondered what in the world the gentlemen could be talking about downstairs so long, and immolated the ex-minister on the altar of their indignation with a fervour which would, if known to the right honourable gentleman, have caused him to quake withal. At last they appeared, and by a process of natural segregation, those most interested in each other's company seemed to get together. Mr. Corrence subsided into the vacant seat next Miss de Gex, and it was edifying to observe that estimable lady's expression of interest and sympathy over her tatting, whilst the great man expatiated on the horrible intrigues of Jesuitism against the Church of England. As this subject always roused the statesman's eloquence in no small degree, and in this particular instance kept him well employed the remaining hour of the evening, we may safely leave him to the approving smiles of his listeners, and proceed to see how the others had disposed of themselves.

Eustace, Violet, Poictiers, and Marion Delessert betook themselves to whist, which, to judge from the noise they made, seemed more productive of mirth than of its usual gravity of interest.

The earl had engaged Fienne in a friendly conversation on the hearth rug; and although the latter stood leaning his arm upon the mantel-piece, with his

back to the company, Lady Nora, who was officiating at the tea table, could see in the pier-glass that he seemed unusually silent and dejected, as he listened to her father. There was a winning gentleness in the earl's manner with younger men, which those least impressed by it found impossible to repel; though he had grown grey in the toils and cares of a life of many vicissitudes, his innate nobility of character had preserved in its integrity that wonderful secret of manner and exquisitely-adjusted temper which once in earlier years had wrung from an exasperated opponent the retort that it was well known to the House that the noble lord's courtesy was always in the inverse ratio to his malice and contempt.

Maurice Fienne had often looked upon that striking face with the intense involuntary admiration of an ambitious mind, which felt the true force of possessions he could not hope to attain to himself; but he had never under-valued the man to whom he had applied from his favourite author, the words

"Speaking in deeds, and deedless in his tongue,

His heart and mind both open, and both free!"

characteristics the worth whereof he probably estimated in a more significant sense than they who heard him and who forgot both the remark and the occasion which prompted it.

"I am afraid" said the earl, "speaking from my own experience, that you will find it a hard task to shake off in private life the entire influence of those passions which sway the political world; many high-minded men enter that arena with the fixed purpose in their own minds of discarding all party bias for

the sake of certain fixed principles ; but I fear that the natural course of events sooner or later necessitates that distinctive line of action which is as necessary to the healthiness of a constitutional government, as it is fatal to individual principle."

"But if those individual principles are strong enough to make head against party spirit?"

"Why, then," replied Lord Celadon, "the same process begins again ; those principles, if the offspring of a character sufficiently powerful to substantiate their claims before the tribunals, which decide upon their merit, become the nucleus of a new party, and in time, the leader, who was first independent and alone, finds himself as much a party man as the most inveterate of his old opponents ; it is, indeed, a recurring phenomenon in the history of the state : true, man persists in dividing the opinions of the political world into two great divisions, and in giving a distinctive name to each, but in reality, the reason for the name dies out in a few generations, in the general modification of opinions, although the distinctive name remains, and new parties are continually forming for the exposition of new principles, closely allied though they may be, and at first scarcely distinguishable from those from which they sprung ; and they who know what the practical working of legislative machinery is, are conscious that party principles wear away to shadows and shibboleths, which, for a long time, content the great mass of superficial thought ; nearly all the great statesmen of the past have been originators of political principles as distinct from the real avowed creed of the one party as from the orthodoxy of the other. But I weary you ; do not let the necessity of party interests discourage you, if you

conscientiously hold opinions which incline you more to one than to the other, and as far as private life is concerned, you will have to consider how far your adherence to certain fixed lines of conduct in public affairs demands the sacrifice of private interests, though I admit," the earl added with feeling, "that these interests most nearly touch our chief happinesses."

"I see," replied Fienne, with a touch of bitterness, "that in whatever he does, man wears the chains of his own slavery."

Nora did not hear her father's reply, as she was called away at that moment to the piano; but she observed that the two remained talking with the same earnestness for some time longer.

Berthon was sitting beside Lady Celadon, on a sofa in the back drawing-room, whilst Ernestine cut the pages of a new novel, and Lilian played the accompaniments to Aubrey's songs. It was not until more than one of them had brought their usual chaff to bear upon her gravity, that Nora shook off the feeling, half curious and half depressive, which the conversation she had just overheard had inspired her with.

Beneath that bright playful exterior, there was a woman's intense sympathy; and she wondered whether she had not done wrong in trifling with the earnestness of a man whose mind was so inscrutable, and apparently so capable of deep and stirring emotions which she could not understand as Maurice Fienne's.

"I always thought there were secrets of strange feelings in that dark face," she said to herself, half shuddering, and she was glad to take the vacant seat at the piano, and to dash into a brilliant rondo to charm away the spirit.

"Lilian does not play like Nora," Lady Celadon re-

marked to George, "but I think she makes up for it in her singing."

"You would not accept my testimony as disinterested," he replied, smiling, "if I gave my opinion; if she is unhappy at St. Cecily's, she can make the piano suffer for it; I want her to come down to Collard's to-morrow, and see whether she likes the one I have chosen."

"Shall we see you on Sunday? You seemed afraid you would not be in town?"

"I must sleep at Warwick on Friday night, but I hope to get back the next day,—that is, unless this child would prefer a quiet Sunday," he added laughingly, to Lady Lilian, who came and sat down on the sofa by him.

"You are not allowed to do as you like now," she said, with a bright consciousness in the eyes she turned on his face. "So you will please come back by the earliest train, and be here early on Sunday morning."

Poor Berthon! with those white shoulders gleaming near him, that little hand on his, and that low voice in his ear, he was faster bound to the behests of that dear thralldom than the mighty captive of old in the iron manacles of the Philistines; and yet, would Harley Grey have pitied him?

The brief evening slipped away. Lady Celadon kept him a willing listener to the thousand thoughts for the future that filled her mother's heart. She only could at that time know what a momentous change awaited her darling girl. But she had faith in Berthon; faith in the sternness of his character, the greatness of the mind, whose outward play was small, but whose power she had been long ago the first to

feel and to appreciate,—faith in the reality and depth of the love he had towards her child. So they talked of the day that was coming nearer and nearer, and he was loth at last to bid a late good-night. Lilian sang yet one or two of her favourite songs; the whist was ended, but there was a silence among them all, and the spell of a voice they loved and knew so well, but whose tones seem to tremble with a tenderer emotion that evening than usual, lay upon them all. Even the apathetic Ness congratulated her, and told her sister, as she kissed her, that her's was the only music she cared for. Berthon was the only one silent around the piano; he felt that there was no need for him to tell her what she knew already: perhaps his feelings were the only ones there too deep for words.

The party then broke up. Poictiers insisted on taking charge of Miss Delessert, and carried on a flirtation down the stairs which his wife ought to have witnessed, for there was a genuineness about Dick's compliments which Lord Aubrey's shyness and Maurice Fienne's polished inventions could not hope to rival.

Fienne stayed the night at his relative's. On his way to the smoking-room he met Lady Nora by the conservatory. He detained her a moment to bid good-night. There was still a shade of wonder on her fair face as she met his dark piercing eyes.

"Have you forgiven me?" he said, holding out his hand.

"Forgiven you what?" she asked, with a smile.

"An involuntary rudeness at dinner, which you provoked me into," he added, falteringly.

"Oh! I never thought you rude, Mr. Fienne," she said, "only——"

"Only what?"

"Nothing—nothing," she replied, breaking into a hurried laugh, "where are you going—downstairs to dream amid clouds?"

"Dream?" he said, "Yes, dream. They say we dream of the last objects our eyes fall on ere they close; if our awakings, Lady Nora, were but half as happy as our dreams, life would be more worth living."

There was a strange emphasis about his last words which a less perceptive nature than Lady Nora's would not have failed to understand. She uttered a few words which the forced laugh prevented him from hearing, and bidding him a hurried farewell, vanished upstairs.

Fienne met Berthon in the hall, where he had been standing talking with Eustace. The cousin would have liked at that time to have detained the departing guest, and to have sought for friendship in the man: it was the momentary desire—the momentary feeling of loneliness. But he could not speak the words, and the door closed on him with whom more than any one else, though neither knew it, his future life was bound up.

Berthon walked slowly back to his rooms. There were bright stars overhead, and a soft south wind was blowing. If he could have then detained the wheels of time, that starlight would never have faded, and the music of that south wind never have hushed.

CHAPTER V.

*"Life is not what it might have been,
Nor are we what we would !
And we must meet with smiling mien,
And part in careless mood,
Knowing that each retains unseen,
In cells of sense subdued,
A little lurking secret of the blood,—
A little serpent secret rankling keen
That makes the heart its food."*

THE WANDERER.

WHEN Harley Grey parted from Berthon in Grosvenor Square he did not go directly homeward. Though he felt tired, he would have preferred turning for a while into the darkening park, to setting out for his proper destination ; and strolled slowly in its direction. He would linger as long as he could about the spot where he left his friend, and away from scenes far removed from those on which his fancy chose rather to dwell. How innocently people talk when they dilate on the attractions of one locality and the drawbacks of another ! In most cases we should find, if we might draw aside the veil, that the expression of preference, or the utterance of a wish, is the involuntary confession of a heart that would fain be where its chief treasures are. It is the association that binds us to the dreariest dwelling, and endears to us the dullest spot on earth ; it is merely the hated recollections of the past, the dim regrets that hover over the cruel partings and the sad losses of life, which make the fairest abodes sunless and the most lively and favoured neighbourhood intolerable.

I think that thoughts somewhat of this nature were

passing through Harley Grey's mind as he paced for the last time round the square. He had a habit of talking to himself as he walked which sometimes made him oblivious of passing things, and on this occasion it was only the sudden cessation in the execrable whistle of a small errand boy, who stopped to wonder who he could be, and what on earth he was talking about to himself, that recalled Harley to consciousness and his mind to the reflection that it was near the dinner hour at home, whilst he was as yet considerably removed from that scene of action.

The fact was, he had followed Berthon into the Celadons' house, and was picturing to himself what was probably passing within ; from which he began to wonder whether he was ever likely to have a lady-love to whom he should carry pearl lockets and tender vows. But Harley Grey was five-and-twenty, and had seen a good deal of life ; moreover he was a scholar (some ill-natured people said, a philosopher of a cynical turn), how should he then be dreaming of such absurdities in earnest ? It would be very unfair to manufacture a confession of those busy thoughts out of those few random sentences, and the ever-changing expression of those pale features, so we will not pursue the inquiry further ; and my fair reader will perhaps indulgently reflect that even at twenty-five the sublime results of experience will sometimes stoop to the ridiculous topics of such things as love and fame and ideal happiness, as if they really existed ; we must wait a year or two longer before the crudities and delusions of boyhood perish in the glaring light of the world which finds it is not worth its while any longer to deceive.

Harley Grey fairly laughed out loud at himself, as

he strode rapidly away in the direction of Bloomsbury. It was in one of those interminable streets of gaunt brick houses, from which the solicitude of a hermit race had carefully guarded the liveliness of even an occasional cab by a series of *culs de sac*, that the Greys dwelt.

Sometimes necessity or curiosity has led the chronicler to re-visit the neighbourhood and that street, and the one impression it would seem to leave upon the mind is that the whole region was destined to remain a standing memorial of an age of absolute stagnation of taste and public spirit. When we reflect on the beauty of the creations of art in bygone ages whether in architecture, painting, or sculpture, it is difficult to realize that modern generations of men could possibly have sunk into such a complete apathy to anything approaching the beautiful,—such a barbarism of hideousness as the architecture of London presents to the art-student of to-day. If there remain any living disciple of “the good old times,” we would recommend no further corrective to a diseased imagination than to give him from the gods a desire for the beautiful, and immediately to transport him to the days when the once fashionable Gower Street was being laid out, or our inimitable National Gallery was being reared. Shade of Athens! revive in us the holy horror of the awful ugliness of those tasteless days!

But to return: long before Harley had crossed Oxford Street homewards, his imagination had fled again. He had seen the Celadon girls a few times, and on one occasion had joined Lady Nora and Lilian in the Row with Berthon; he might have done so oftener, had he not had an aversion to borrowing

his friend's horses, though continually offered to him. He had seen enough of them to understand, or thought he did, what there was in the younger sister which had drawn Berthon's preference to her. He thought Lady Nora brilliant, and had found in himself a response to her unconscious power of conversation; but whilst enjoying that continual cross-fire of repartee and easy friendliness of manner which characterised her, he shrank from the apparent coldness of her cruel wit, at the moments when most he owned the fascination she exercised, and felt the nameless charm of her sister's gentler beauty. It was natural, therefore, that his thoughts should turn to them, and dwell on the great happiness of his best friend, who had won for his bride the fairest and sweetest girl that Harley Grey had yet met in the world; and we can the better understand how it was that with his reverence for his friend, and his intimate knowledge of his character and undoubted powers, he yet had half told him that he did not now appreciate the heart he had won. We are so obstinate, that notwithstanding the whole experience of our lives teaches us the marvellous difference between anticipation and the reality, we persist in dressing in the same brilliant imagery every coveted possession which is still sufficiently distant to gain from the paintings of fancy.

"I don't care," he exclaimed one day in a conversation with Berthon on this very subject, "be the realization of hopes what it will, it is at least *real* for the time." And there was a savageness about the expression of that opinion which betrayed the working of a more passionate nature than George Berthon cared to offend. And so he dreamed and dreamed, and actually heard the sound of Lilian Celadon's

wedding bells that were to be, when he found himself on his own door-step facing an open door-way which he had opened with his key without knowing it.

I think I have hinted to the reader what the outside of that house was like. Harley glanced up its face in the dusk and sighed : he would fain indeed have exchanged that horrid impervious screen across the drawing-room window and the faded curtains of the upper rooms with their rain-beflecked panes for a brighter dwelling in a brighter region. He looked at his watch ; it was late, and he hurried up the creaking wooden staircase. The drawing-room door opened and closed immediately, but not before a little figure had slipped out, and the next moment Harley felt a child's arms round his neck and a little hurried whispering voice in his ear—

“ Make haste, darling ; papa is so angry that you are so late ! ”

“ Why, Katie, they have not waited dinner for me, have they ? ” he said, carelessly. “ I said I should be late.”

“ Mamma says you didn't,” replied the little girl, “ and papa won't let us go down till you come. May I say you were kept by business, darling, and will be down in a minute ? ”

“ Anything you like, my pet,” he said, kissing her anxious little face tenderly ; and then he mounted to his own room, which was at the top of the house, and when he reached it he was so exhausted that it was some seconds before he could rise from the chair on to which he sank. Let us descend again, and follow Katie.

There was no light in the room, and its occupants were scarcely distinguishable from one another. The

little girl ran to one of her sisters, who was standing at the window gazing into the darkened street, and whispered—

“He is come, and will be down directly; shall I tell papa so?”

“It doesn’t much matter whether you do or not,” said a gruff voice behind them. “Come along, girls: I suppose that fool will make his appearance by-and-bye.” And Mr. Grey, who had been deprived of his dinner for a quarter of an hour, went down stairs. The rest of the family followed. There was certainly more cheerfulness in the dining-room, where the lamp was lit and the curtains closed. Mr. Grey took his seat at the head of the table, and after a muttered thunder, which may have passed for grace, though it were difficult to say whether blessing or curse was thereby intended, he set himself to the task of swearing at the carving-knife, which he stigmatised, perhaps with some degree of justice, as a saw, and of cutting up the leg of mutton before him.

Mr. Grey was a tall man; he was not big, for his shoulders sloped away very obtusely from his neck, and there was little breadth about him, but he defined his presence mentally as commanding, and his face, if it did not possess any remarkable degree of intelligence, yet showed that amount of worldly ‘cuteness’ which the average man picks up in the rough work of a bustling city life, and which, coupled with a certain hardness of outline and a severity of expression that would seem to deny the very existence of good-nature, favoured him in the eyes of his business acquaintances, and persuaded Mrs. Grey that she had a decidedly clever husband. That lady sat at the other end of the table anxiously watching his progress with

the mutton ; an anxiety, indeed, that might have suggested to innocent strangers that she found herself sometimes in the same boat with the offending carving-knife ; but there was something more about Mrs. Grey which attracted attention. Twenty years earlier in her married life women had described her as "an interesting creature ;" men, on the other hand, with their proverbial lack of appreciation, called her insipid. She was now, at the age of fifty, both in person and character, still more difficult of definition. A slight spare figure, that suggested delicate health, pale features, which had once deserved to be styled pretty, but of that prettiness which is as helpless as it is fleeting, and a slight nervousness of expression and manner, even in composure, may be taken as giving some idea of Harley's mother. It was impossible to disbelieve her when she told you with a weary look in her almost colourless eyes, "That she had had great trials," though you might wonder in what exact sense she used that most comprehensive word in the female vocabulary.

The rest of the family consisted of a son, older than Harley, of whom more hereafter ; and three girls. Little Katie, Harley's favourite, was only twelve, and she amused herself with a book at papa's right hand during the serious progress of dinner. Charlotte, the eldest girl, was a striking likeness of her father, but already the years had passed away in which she might have been called pretty ; she declared it was necessary for her to dress in black, and the plain high close-fitting dress she wore with her great-aunt's steel brooch in front did not serve to set off a thin and rather expressionless face, where (cruel truth !) twenty-seven monotonous years had begun to work

indelible indications of a matured womanhood. Annie, the other daughter, was altogether of a more dashing style than her sister; she was plump, and might have been rosy but for the inexorable conditions of life which kept them for ever penned up in that lively red-brick neighbourhood. There was a good-natured expression about her which was wanting in the others; and if propitious fate should assign to her a desirable lover, who might carry her off from the bosom of her family to somewhat brighter regions before the bloom of two-and-twenty had vanished, we might predict that Annie Grey would not be of a less happy disposition.

Such was the home where George Berthon's friend had passed his uneventful early years. That young man's presence at the table broke a long silence.

"This is what you call punctuality, I suppose, sir?" observed his father, sitting up in his chair and rolling his napkin with both hands into horrible creases.

"I am very sorry you waited for me," he said quietly; "I had no idea it was so late."

"It is a pity, my dear boy, you don't arrange to come home earlier," said his mother in regretful tones; "your father was getting quite anxious about you, and the mutton is so overdone, it is nearly spoilt."

"Stuff and humbug,—anxious!" exclaimed Mr. Grey; "but it would be well if you learnt to be a little more considerate to others in your hours."

Harley felt guilty, and did not reply, but glanced curiously at the mutton to discover the damage he was the cause of.

"Where have you been, dear?" asked his mother, tenderly.

"With his grand friends I will warrant," said Mr. Grey.

"Have you been with Mr. Berthon, Harley?" inquired Charlotte, who had once written that name three times in her prayer book during a sermon.

"Yes, I have," he replied, with a quick perception of coming events.

"Why does not Mr. Berthon call here?" inquired Annie; "I am sure it is months since he came that afternoon and dined here."

"He left his card," said Harley; "it is only six weeks ago now," and recollections more vivid than welcome rose in his mind at the moment concerning that same dinner.

"Well, my dears," interposed Mrs. Grey, taking up the sauce-ladle and laying it down again without renewing the supply of onion on her husband's patient plate. "Well, my dears, if Mr. Berthon prefers to stay away, I am sure we would rather he did."

"My opinion is that that fellow is a vile snob." This last came from Lawrence Grey, Esq., the eldest son and heir of the family, who occupied the chair opposite Harley, and glanced over the table with a look of contempt for his brother's low tastes as spontaneous as it was withering.

The pale cheeks became suffused with passionate blood, but Harley did not trust himself to reply. Mr. Grey, apparently quite indifferent to the turn the conversation had taken, growled forth without lifting his eyes from his knife and fork—

"It will be a good thing for you, my boy, when you make up your mind to drop those swell friends of yours. You had much better be employed over old Morley's papers than in calling in Grosvenor Square."

"He has no grandeur about him," Harley answered hotly, "unless it is——" and then he stopped.

"Unless what?" asked Lawrence, with a sneer.

"Grandeur of character, that you can neither conceive nor appreciate," was the retort, given with an emphasis which caused his brother's eyes to flash.

"My dear Harley, do moderate your language," exclaimed Mrs. Grey, terrified at the prospect of a general fracas; "you always come home so cross. I don't know what there is to make you so, when you have everything you can possibly want."

"The air of Grosvenor Square," growled Lawrence, by way of supplementing the blank.

"Those Celadons," said Mr. Grey, "are the biggest Tories out, confound them! and you will never learn either common sense or money-making in the flunkeyism of that house."

All this time Harley maintained an obstinate silence. His food choked him; he felt his cheeks were burning with shame and indignation, and he longed to rush away and be alone. His elder brother laughed with savage satisfaction at the success of the attack.

"You may say what you like," Annie observed, "they are very pretty girls, and I admire Harley's taste."

"These rich people, my dear," returned her mother, "are very disagreeable, absolutely heartless;" and she leant back in her chair with a sigh of genuine or imaginary pity.

"I wish I had the old fool's money," observed Mr. Grey, and there is no doubt the desire was real.

"How on earth did Mr. Berthon get engaged to Miss Celadon?" said Charlotte.

"Lady Lilian, my dear; earl's daughters are not called miss; I wish you would remember these things."

Charlotte shrugged her high shoulders, and her mother continued to enlighten her.

"Why, they say that he is really a son of the great Mr. Landon, and the earl, who is very extravagant, has borrowed large sums of money from him."

"Who the devil is Mr. Landon?" exclaimed Lawrence, eyeing his mother with intense indignation, for he had imparted the information to her himself.

"A gentleman of large fortune, who has immense estates in the south of England," continued Mrs. Grey, accustomed to similar polite interpellations.

"A pack of damned nonsense, every word of it," observed her husband; and thereupon ensued silence.

Harley looked round, and was relieved to find that little Katie had slipped out of the room; he was, to say the truth, not a little amused, nor was he disposed to enlighten the disputants.

Mrs. Grey resumed, after a few moments: "You need not use such language, dearest; it was your friend Mr. Sutton who told me last Sunday."

"That's a lie!" observed Lawrence, with calm satisfaction; "for I told you myself the other day all about it, and you've made up this ridiculous humbug out of it."

Now this young gentleman very possibly suspected that Harley was better informed than himself on the subject, and did not care to commit himself to the sanction of a rumour he had picked up in a slightly varied form to his mother's version, at the sporting club of which he had the honour to be a member. Perhaps I may as well pause here to indicate the par-

ticular line of life in which Mr. Lawrence Grey shone. His father, who had on two occasions come to grief in the city in partnerships of doubtful stability, and concerns whose exact tendency it was a delicate matter to define, had, with all the desire of making a large and rapid fortune, scarcely the hope to shine in any brilliant capacity thereafter, but relegated the duty of emblazoning the family name either in letters, statecraft, or arms, he was not particular which, unto his eldest son. His wife naturally shared these confidences, and although she was quick enough to notice that the younger brother's character and abilities were cast in a more favourable mould for the purpose, she either never had dared to presume so against her husband's opinion, or secretly shared his idea that Harley's constitution would never last till manhood. So Lawrence Grey was pushed on from one large school to another, his father never being satisfied with the results of any, till he could enter the University, and the splendid advantages of Oxford were thrown open to him, whilst his parents gave up no small portion of a circumscribed income to his maintenance and due standing thereat. But the gods who ruled in that Olympus failed to recognize the distinct claims of Mr. Grey's intellectual powers; nevertheless there were those who did, and among the classic tribe of bull-dog trainers and small touts his peculiar aptitudes were fully appreciated. To do Lawrence Grey justice, he was fully aware of his own want of weight in the race his anxious parents had set him to run. Mr. Grey did not object during the first two or three terms to periodical demands on his liberality, but when those tastes, which his son assured him were indispensable to the true aristocracy of learning, at

that stage developed by a natural and rapid process into excesses, which began to make the air even of Oxford disagree with him, his father's eyes began also slowly to open, and it came to pass that the house of cards came down with a crash. The bills had to be paid, and Lawrence had to face failure at the University and an enraged parent at home. To say the truth, the first did not trouble him, and his prize-fighting propensities stood him in good stead when the latter vial of wrath was poured on his devoted head. It is impossible to dwell on the extraordinary process of events which led Mrs. Grey again to supreme faith in the character of her eldest born, and Mr. Grey to a renewed belief in the necessity of making him a very fine gentleman.

Lawrence went into the army. Meteor-like he shone, meteor-like he fell, and a desultory existence in the irksome stillness of home followed on eighteen months of every kind of dissipation and extravagance. Nominally he worked in his father's counting-house, and the qualification will explain much that need not be added here.

The settlement with his son's creditors was a terrible work for poor Mr. Grey; but it was worse for the brother and sisters. Harley had never taken part in the discussion of subjects the very thought of which maddened him. But it could not be otherwise than that he should secretly suffer. What would he have given for the same opportunities? The brothers became utter strangers to each other.

"Men talk of slavery," he wrote to Berthon, "of the iron links that couple malefactors together; I tell you that to live under the same roof with those between whom and yourself there is not one chord of

sympathy, manacled in the fetters of blood relationship, is the most awful doom of the two."

These were passionate words, probably exaggerations, but they suffice to show something of that daily life. Harley himself fretted for the things that wealth could purchase, but they became poorer; he wrestled with passions that overcame him; he anticipated fervently the slow result of long years; he pined for freedom; he dreamt of fame. The money which could have procured him subsistence in fighting his way at the bar went to pay *the debts of honour* of his brother, who took it as his due. Still he would try the law, and Harley Grey was articled to a firm of solicitors. Years went on; he was free now, and in receipt of an income which more than sufficed for his own wants, but other claims were about him still.

This slight sketch will perhaps throw light on the constitution of the household which was gathered round the table that evening. Lawrence Grey envied the circle of friends among whom Harley moved as much as he avowedly despised them; Berthon he particularly disliked, and spared no pains to instil a similar sentiment into his weak-minded mother, whose only corrective against his influence was a woman's leaning towards a sphere of life above her own.

When openly insulted by her son, Mrs. Grey was neither indignant nor tearful; she was cowed. Mr. Grey continued his sullen meal with too much contempt for his wife's "tattle," as he styled it, to interfere. Harley knew the inevitable result of a protest, and was indeed himself too hurt at the treatment which the names he honoured had received to attempt to save his mother. So the family squabble flourished to the end of the meal, when Mrs. Grey

withdrew with her daughters, and poured out her woes to a sympathetic audience upstairs. After a short time nature reasserted her rights, however, and twenty minutes afterwards she was discussing Mr. Berthon and the earl's family with her girls, just as if nothing had happened to disturb her. She evidently knew the whole story—as yet untold in these pages—of the mysterious Mr. Landon's connection with the family, who George Berthon was, and how it came to pass that a young man of unmistakable personal pretensions, but otherwise of no account in the fashionable world, had been blind to the natural attractions of No. 16, Retford Street—one of the Greys' set, in fact—and had successfully wooed, in the language of the *Court Chronicle*, as Charlotte read it, "the charming, beautiful, and accomplished Lady Lilian Celadon," &c., &c.

Down stairs silence reigned. Mr. Grey drank execrable claret, and occupied himself with three pocket-books, a bundle of letters, and some stock calculations of infinite interest to him. Lawrence yawned, growled, and consumed the sherry; Harley was not very happy, and wild thoughts were passing through his mind. By-and-bye his brother filled his pipe, and, putting on his hat and coat, vanished from the scene to regions more congenial to his habits.

There was an attempt at music upstairs, which broke down, as Mr. Grey announced he had a headache, and fell asleep in the great chintz chair in the front room. His wife mended socks, pensive and silent. The girls were obliged to betake themselves likewise to needlework, but Annie preferred her novel; she, however, managed to get near Harley's newspaper, and drew him cautiously into conversation about the Celadons and Berthon.

The clock pointed to ten, and the sisters disappeared. Leaving the cold and silent drawing-room, where his father continued snoring complacently, and with an unresponded kiss on his mother's sad face, Harley quitted the scene too. On the staircase landing by his room, he paused at the sound of his own name.

"Harley!" said a feeble voice from the recesses of a dark room, whose door stood ajar. He pushed it open, and went in.

"What is it, Katie?" he asked, as a little white figure rose up in bed.

"I can't go to sleep," she said. "Please light the candle, and come and talk to me a little while; I am so unhappy, Harley."

These last words were spoken in a tone of such real sorrow, that Harley, against his first impulse, complied with her wishes, and drew a chair to the bedside, to hear what the child had got to say.

She let his hand wander over her forehead, fondly twining the flaxen tresses round his fingers, and gazing earnestly into his face, she said—

"Dear Harley, have they been very unkind to you?"

"Who, Katie?"

"Downstairs," she replied, with a child's fearfulness of manner.

He could not help smiling.

"No, darling; what are you thinking about? you have been dreaming."

"I'm sure they have," she persisted, "for I heard them talking at dinner; it makes me so unhappy."

"Why should it, Katie? it is nothing," he said, with an effort.

"Is it because they think you are too fond of me?"

said the little girl, with such a look in her eyes that he started. "They say you spoil me, Harley," she added, and a great tear dropped upon her hand.

"Nonsense, Katie, you must not let such thoughts come into your mind. Papa was only a little put out because I came home so late."

"But I know it's true," she continued, not at all convinced, "and they don't like your friend, Harley, and I do, because he loves you, or you would not always be with him, and they are angry because I said I liked him, and Lawrence said he was a bad man, and I was a little fool, and I cried so till you came home; I do every day, Harley, when they don't see me. I wish you would always stay with me," and Katie put her arms round his neck, and sobbed.

"Listen to me, darling," he said, gently removing the little hands that clung so closely, and kissing her wet white cheeks; "it is wrong, Katie, to talk like this, and wrong to cry when I am away; you must try and not think of these things. Lawrence is a little rough, I know, but he does not always mean what he says, and he is very fond of you, Katie."

"I hate him!" she cried, vehemently.

Harley was pained and perplexed; here was in miniature, as it were, the tempest of his own strong passions.

"Hush, child! It is very wicked, Katie, to say such a thing," he said. "What would mamma, or Lotty, or Annie say if they heard you? You should try and love every one at home, Katie, even if they are sometimes unkind."

"I can't, I can't!" she said, still crying. "He never kisses me, and says such wicked things about you;

they are not true, darling!" she exclaimed, kissing his troubled face, and with a look and tone that showed how great was her faith in him, and how rudely it had been wounded. "He says you are selfish, and do not care for any one; and mamma is so sad, dear Harley, and the day is so long. How can I be happy, as you tell me, or love any one who does not love me as you do?"

It was simply impossible to stand such irresistible logic as that child talked. Harley marvelled greatly, and turned over in his mind what he could urge to soothe her.

"If you love me, Katie, as you say, will you do anything I ask you to?"

"Yes, anything," she said, wonderingly.

"Will you be kind to poor Lawrence, for my sake; and try and be fond of him, and kiss him, as you do me?"

Katie's eyes opened wide; after a silence, she said, very slowly,

"If—you say so—Harley, I will try, but—"

"But what, Katie?"

"Why do you say '*poor* Lawrence?'"

Here was a poser even for Harley.

"Because he is not happy, Katie," he said, with a smile at her expression of curiosity.

A new light came into the little girl's mind; she repeated the words to herself, "Because he is not happy?" and lay then quite still as if tired with so much perplexity.

Harley slowly rose, and folding her in his arms with such a fond caress as could only come from a heart seared in the great world's toil and sorrow, bursting with intense affection for one darling innocent nature,

which he felt was all his own, he laid her gently on the sleepless pillow, wet with childhood's tears, and extinguishing the light, noiselessly slipped away to his own chamber.

The autumn moon was streaming through the window, and Harley felt it almost a sacrilege lighting the candle on his table. He sank into the chair where he had passed so many solitary hours alone with his books and his reveries, and surrendered himself, tired as he was, to the rushing tide of thoughts that thronged upon his brain. His watch slowly ticked beside him, and the shadows of the moon crept further and further up the wall; the silence was a relief, and the young man bowed his head upon his hands, and waited for the spell to pass. From early years he had been accustomed to read a portion of Holy Writ before he retired to rest, so much the more that family prayers were not known in that house, and sometimes he felt its power to charm the ache that the day had left. But to-night his heart was full of darker thoughts.

"What can it tell me," he said to himself, "that I do not know already? is it—is it all a delusion, a disappointment, and a mockery?" and then he thought of George and Lilian and their happiness; and passionately of the child he had left sleeping, and the work of cruel blighting going on in that tender nature. It was hours that night before the voices which he set before him of old as speaking truth, re-asserted their old sway; hours before Harley left the night and the thoughts of night to take care of themselves, and sought in sweet oblivion strength to face the dawn of another day.

And here for the present we must leave him. It is

painful to contemplate the young life clouded, and the youthful spirit bowed ; and there are many who deny the truth of such suppositions : but what can be said in the face of the facts of life ? Uneven and unlike is the experience allotted to the competitors in the early part of the race, yet endowed with common hopes, common powers, common ends to strive for. Who can trace the root of the care in the anxious face we pass in the street,—or who believes that the statesman's brow is clouded, and the philosopher's mind darkened, from the thought of the shadow in his secret chamber and the spring which welleteth by his own hearthstone ?



CHAPTER VI.

*"Our separation so abides and flies,
That thou, residing here, go'st yet with me,
And I, hence fleeting, here remain with thee."*

ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

HAPPY is the man who gains for himself from the short day the first fresh hours of the morning ! They are more valuable than rest at noon, and the solitude of night, when the work is done and the world asleep, is not to be compared with them. What a superior being is he who sets out with the sun to run his race ! he feels himself immeasurably exalted above the slumberers who rise hours later more fatigued than himself : they are madly dreaming, useless members of society, whilst he is clothed, and in his right mind. I am not sure that the exaltation of being awake, up, washed, dressed, and comforted with coffee, before weaker mortals hurl the first anathema at boots'

cheerful reminder or Sarah's knuckles, is not apt to engender a dangerous pride in the mind of the superior species. Know ye, then, O victims of a sleepy toilet, hurried breakfast, and a press of waiting business, that the clearest minds, the best thoughts, and the best hours of work are those which are contemporaneous with the sparrow's first chirp, or, it may be, with the sweep's musical call.

Being refreshed with these moral considerations, we hunt up our friends. Earl Celadon had always been an early riser. He declared that an analysis of his working hours would have shown more work actually accomplished before breakfast than in the rest of the day, by the which he meant that, apart from what he read or wrote in the early morning, he planned what was to be done in the after part of the day, and how it was to be done. So we find him that bright September morning, alone in his study, in paternal dressing gown, and slippers tender to toes, carefully adjusted in his favourite chair, with his feet up, scanning the paper. The arrangement of his writing-table shewed that he had finished for the time his occupation there. That room was very sacred to him; impervious was the double-door, and none but the heaviest tread could extract much sound from its carpet. The earl maintained that he was a man of simple tastes and habits, but that he had a right to have one chair in the house which Epicurus could have envied, and one carpet which might be called luxurious. Here, too, was the mysterious cabinet where reposed in cedar gloom the cigars he used to woo the rarer muses; and here in cases which speck of dust was never allowed to desecrate were the selected volumes which he said had been the daily

mental food of thirty years. There was not much of interest that morning in the paper, for it was the happy days of parliamentary recess, and advertisements gloried in the columns at other times devoted to wisdom of another kind, though possibly of an equally instructive tendency. Politics were drowsy, too, abroad, and Watts' logic was decidedly preferable to "Our special correspondent" at Ems or Baden-Baden.

Just as the earl dropped his newspaper, there was a light tap at the door, which he knew; and the next minute Lady Lilian was within those sacred precincts. His face brightened with pleasure as she knelt at his side, and pleaded with her laughing lips for the morning's kisses.

"Dear papa! how comfortable and venerable you look!" she said; "have you finished the paper, or shall I read to you, or arrange the flowers?"

Like a fresh-gathered rose from the garden of beauty, with the gems of the dew undried, she seemed, her sweet face fresh and bright as the morning itself; she still loved to appear in the simple dresses of her girlhood, and the sunlight played like a lover, too, in the braided coils of her glorious hair. Lilian had looked in her glass that morning, and she knew that she was beautiful; but, unlike most girls, the thought would make her sad, lest she should ever fall into the delusion that loveliness could do the work of virtue. This sounds pedantic, but it was very like what she used to write in her little gilt-edged morocco diary in these days. Such outsiders as had heard her once exclaim with the bitterness of nineteen, "I hate virtuous people!" would not, of course, believe this; but then, they had no part in the sacred contents of the writing

desk and the gilt-leaved diary, and it did not matter to them what she wrote in that collection of hypocriticisms.

"Dear papa, *do* answer me!" she said, as the earl did not seem to be aware of any question but the silent one of those loving eyes which were gazing up into his. No smile could equal in tenderness that into which the stern features of the statesman would relax when one of his beloved ones was the object.

"My child," he said, "the flowers do not need your attention; indeed, I fear they are past recovery this morning; but I wish you to sit here by me, until the letters come."

Lilian, nothing loth, seated herself on the low stool, and subsided into becoming gravity.

"Now, Lilian, tell me," he said, "is George likely to use you very badly, do you think?"

"Not very, papa. I am afraid he is too kind sometimes."

"You think so, do you? If you take my advice, my darling, you will never believe those who will try and persuade you the contrary. You know that George Berthon has up-hill work before him; however clever you may think him—and there are plenty of the idle and ignorant in the world who lean on men like he is, and accept their opinions without examination—he is only one of a great number of clever and energetic men who strive for the rewards of great industry and abilities in England, and he will not always be love-making. He will look to you for sympathy and help, my child, and perhaps you may some day be tempted to think that he does not love you so much as he declares now, but from what I know of George, I think, nay, I am sure, Lilian, that his first

thought at home will be your happiness, and whatever should tend to depreciate your opinion of your husband—I speak of the influence of circumstances and of strangers—will in the end detract from that happiness. Do you think you quite understand what I mean ?”

“I think so, papa ; he was talking the day before yesterday about it, and said I might some day think he had forgotten—all he has said to me,” she continued, after a moment’s hesitation ; “but I am quite sure I never shall, papa ; he is so fond of you, and so full of admiration and affection for you and darling mother, that he must be like you, and I have never asked myself any questions about your love for me, papa !”

And Lilian knelt again on the stool, and caught his hand in hers, and looked so earnestly at his grave, smiling features, that her father felt the touch of her enthusiasm.

“I believe you, child—I believe you thoroughly,” he said, kissing her. “There is a fashion in society, Lilian, for women to think that they marry for their husbands’ credit, and that all that wealth can procure, or position can give, is the due, not of their efforts for men’s happiness, but of the honour they do them in becoming their wives. Not that I do not know you better,” he added, observing the colour which mounted into her cheeks, and thinking that he had perhaps read her a page of human nature which she would soon enough read for herself. “Your own dear mother is unlike many, and I am proud and happy to think that her girls are all, more or less, like her ; but I know, my dear child, that you will find a great change in your opinion of the world when you have exp-

rienced some of its trials, and I would not have you forget, whatever you find hereafter to be false which you first thought genuine, that all you have been taught of the ways of life, and all those sentiments of affection for those whom you love, and nobility of character in your husband and others, are lastingly true and essential to real happiness. Depend upon it, my darling girl, that if ever, in God's providence, George Berthon should achieve brilliant success in life, he will be the first to tell you that you were his greatest comfort and his chief aid. No man, Lilian, ever yet was happy in success, however apparently splendid, whose wife did not have any share in its achievement."

Lilian Celadon had always found a pleasure in getting her father to talk on subjects which few other girls would have cared for; and, of late, the earl had often, when they were alone, spoken in a similar manner of her approaching marriage with George Berthon, as if he had learned the lessons of the world so deeply that he felt he could not send her away from them all into those

"Other realms of love,"

without an affectionate, and even anxious warning of the many changes she would experience, and of the rude shocks to early thoughts and simple faiths which had been hitherto characteristic of her childish years. And she believed her father so thoroughly, that although she felt some shade of his anxiety, and at times a faint trembling of some fear she could not define, so great an oracle of goodness was he to her that she did not allow it to be the cause of a momentary unhappiness.

Lord Celadon then turned the conversation on to other and lighter themes, and was glad of the pretext of sending his little, trustful, clinging daughter—for he still called her by all the endearing epithets of childhood—to bring him in his letters.

She returned with a handful; among many of lesser interest and moment there was one whose handwriting instantly caught his eye. The post-mark was Florence, and he recognized the hand of his old friend Greville Landon. He broke the seal, and read a few lines.

"Thank God, the dear fellow is well," he said, and then placed the epistle, which was lengthy, on one side, for leisurely perusal after the others were disposed of. Lilian waited till he was engaged, and slipped from the room to read the one she held in her hand, directed to herself.

There was no one as yet in the library, as she peeped in, so she went and sat on the couch in the window, while her little dog, who was never allowed into papa's study, and whined away the time in the conservatory which she had spent with her father, stood up on his hind legs, and placed his white paws on her knee, with ears extended, and curious eyes, as if he too was particularly interested in the well-known handwriting. Poor Tony, how little he knew the infinite distance between his dumb affection and the realms into which his fair young mistress soared, when she opened those closely written sheets!

That letter was as follows :

"MY OWN DARLING LILIAN,

"Though I have just parted from you, I know you will look for a letter in the morning, as I shall

not see you again till the end of the week. It seems to me quite an age. Do you think, Lilian, that this reflection will hold good five years hence, if we prolong existence till then? The idea seems quite laughable; but you say I am always anticipating the time to come. I own it is unfair, but the first day of our engagement, darling, is a long time ago already, is it not?

"I am tired to-night, and have had so many papers to go through this evening; they are all thrown away now, love, and I have nothing to think of but my own sweet Lilian. It is quite warm, and I am sitting at an open window; there is a glorious moon on the river, which looks dark and beautiful under its thousand lights and silvery chains, rushing away under the bridges to the sea; there is a full tide to-night, and it is going out past here like a flood. What a change from the noise and glare of day it is! I think this great river at night, with its mighty city asleep on its banks, is one of the most solemn and impressive scenes a man can contemplate. I remember years ago, love, watching the same stars and the same shadows of the quaint old Temple, and wondering whether there was in all the world some one who could satisfy my craving for an endless love, if I could only find her. I used to picture her, Lilian, her thoughts, her life, and her destiny, but I could never draw her face, though I tried; nothing satisfied me.

"Now that dream is a reality, and I no longer conjure up an unknown form, and I have my little Lilian's picture by me. How I long, my own beloved, for the inseparable years! I would—

" 'Leap the grades of life and light,
And flash at once, my friend, to thee!'

"That is a sweet word, 'friend,' Lilian ; we string together many endearing epithets in our vain and weak endeavours to give human speech to unutterable feelings and thoughts ; but there are few words which mean so much ; so, little love, you must be a friend to me, and I to you, or we are nothing to each other. You will scarcely be able to read this writing, I am afraid, my hand trembles so, and thoughts come thick and fast. When I send a few to you, Lilian, what can I tell you that you do not know ? it is always, always one tale, one wish, one desire, darling ! O Lilian ! I am weak when I am with you : I feel like St. Paul of old, fearful that I am only great in word ; but I strive hard, dearest, to make my whole life nobler than it has been. I can no longer be patient away from you, Lilian ; if my love for you is greater every day, it is that you have become my own life, and the yearning is inexpressible to have you with me, by me, day and night, for ever. How terrible, dear Lilian, to think that that union could ever come to an end, or more terrible still, that our love could ever grow cold ! May we rise together to that existence, where the loves of the immortals are as pure as they are everlasting ! Pray for me, my own beloved, pray for us both, that the future may find us true to each other, as we have dreamt in the happy, happy days which are gone. I cannot write more to-night ; I shall visit you in my dreams, I am sure. Do not let these sweet eyes be ever sad, or those lips, to whom I send a thousand passionate kisses, ever smile at one thought I may not share. Good-night, my queen ! my warmest love to your dear circle. Send me a message, little one, to-morrow. This day fortnight, my Lilian will be my wife ! God bless

you with unspeakable blessings, my own darling.

"Ever yours,

"GEORGE BERTHON."

She read it twice, the second time slowly through. Somewhere in that second perusal the letters became indistinct, and something very like tears had to be brushed away before Lilian could proceed. She did not quite know what there was to draw them, but she covered the letter with tenderer kisses than usual, and put it carefully away, to be read and re-read, how many times between then and night? A blithe voice singing gaily broke her silence, and Nora entered, pirouetting across the room as if she was practising for the opera the airs of which were ringing in her head. She finally settled herself on Lilian's knee, and kissed her with the most patronizing grace in the world.

"Have you heard from him, pet?" she said, though she could not have looked into those eyes without knowing.

Though Nora, to all appearances, was quite above the ways of lovers, she was the only one of Lilian's sisters who saw those letters occasionally; so after a moment's hesitation, she drew the precious missive from its hiding place, and placed it in Nora's hands. That young lady read it through with a very business-like seriousness, and never once smiled from the first word to the last. Then she said—

"I wish I could write such letters."

"To whom, darling?"

"To myself, you silly child, to whom else?" and as if she were conscious of having said something very

weak, she laughed, and said she had not believed that George was so sentimental. Lilian left her to repent the word, and went into the breakfast room.

Nora remained behind, picking petals off the geraniums.

"Sentimental!" she said to herself; "dear me, how silly I am. Poor child, she does hate that word so. I wonder whether Maurice could write such a love-letter, if he tried? Dear George, how much he must love her; I think I should love him too, if I were Lilian: only I could never half understand what he meant; men are singular creatures!" with which reflection she tore the last leaf in half, and tossed it away, very much relieved, and went in to breakfast too.

What in the world do lovers find to say in their long letters every day? Nora had often wondered, and it was still a mystery to her, except in the case of George Berthon, whom she had the audacity secretly to declare was the only man in the world who could write a love-letter worth reading. Despite the point of that old query, Berthon generally found himself at the end of his notepaper, he said, before he had scarcely begun; and as for the Lady Lilian, it would be a hazardous guess how many sheets she was wont to fill. How sad is that infatuation! It was a good thing that the wedding-day, the time for the dispelling of those strange delusions, was near at hand. Lord Eustace, himself, was wont to marvel greatly as to the contents of Lilian's budgets. That morning he greeted his sister with his usual tenderness. He loved her greatly, and every day that broke he felt more and more the irreparable loss she would be to him and all. Perhaps this young man was not of the sort, if sort there be,

who care for the art of love ; so it remained a mystery to him how his friend Berthon, whom he associated with all the dry sternness of a legal court's atmosphere and with whom he was most at home discussing questions of political economy, could have in him the stuff whereof lovers' letters are made. How many a poet is there in the world whom we take at least for a statistician, or how often do we set down for a cynical rationalist the most imaginative and tender-hearted of mortals !

Eustace found out that there was a visit to a jeweller's that morning, from which Lilian was to be excluded, so he left Fienne to amuse himself with the ladies, and persuaded his sister to ride with him.

It was a glorious morning, and the wind blew blithely from the south, as the two cantered away into the beautiful park, whose leafy avenues were still in their splendour, notwithstanding the lateness of the year.

When they drew up to a walking pace beneath the trees at the end of the drive, Lilian said to her brother—

"I forget, Eustace, whether you have ever been to Ilceston ?"

"Some years ago I was there for a short time with my father."

"What sort of a place is it, dear ?"

"A fine old house, with endless galleries, and rambling wings with countless rooms ; it stands on the side of a great hill, looking over the sea."

"Are there many woods there ?"

"Yes, the trees in the park are splendid ; in one valley they run quite down to the shore. I remember roaming about them when I was there, and coming to

the edge of the cliffs so suddenly that it was a near shave of going over. In winter they say the storms carry the waves right up the glens in the cliffs, and make a thundering noise. It is a glorious old place ; if I were Landon I should live there altogether ; the views from the house are splendid. You see for miles along the coast ; the whole country suggests Sir Philip de Mallory and his legends ; it is rocky and wild."

"I am so glad we are going there," said Lilian, "I want to see the place so much ; I am afraid I shall be frightened, though, if the house is very large and lonely."

"Why George will be with you, child, and he knows every inch of it. The part of the house where you will be, is newly built, and very comfortable. Landon has spent immense sums of money upon it since his father died ; I believe it is a very different place from what it once was."

"Does he live there much now ?"

"No, I think he prefers to be nearer his friends in town ; but then he is such an extraordinary man that no one ever knows where he is."

"I admire him so much," she said, "I think his face is quite beautiful. Don't you remember when he came to see us a year ago, and stayed in Grosvenor Square, on his way to Rome, how sweet and kind he was to us all ?"

"Yes, he is a very fascinating man, though some say, you know, that he has a devil of a temper sometimes ; but I never knew anyone who had seen it ; perhaps he will be at Ilceston when you arrive, no one knows."

"Don't, Eustace, you quite frighten me ; I should be afraid of Mr. Landon in that great house."

"What, you silly child, afraid of George's best friend in the world ?"

"Well," she said with hesitation, "I don't exactly know how we should get on together : I know I am awfully nervous, but there always seems to me a mystery about him which would be so dreadful if—"

"If what ?"

"If he were to raise the ghosts which are said to haunt those old rooms," she replied, with a forced laugh, and tapping her horse lightly with the whip, she bounded into a canter again.

"Do you think that he is a very good man ?" she asked after a little while, returning to the same subject.

Eustace laughed.

"What sort of goodness ; it all depends ?"

"I don't believe he is," she said, without the explanation asked for, "though I don't exactly know why I should say so ; but people say such strange things of him."

"I should like to know, Lilian, what George would say if he were here ; it used to make him so angry years ago, when I first knew him, if I uttered an opinion backed up by 'people say : ' and here you are passing sentence on Landon. You may well fear the ghosts, or rather spirits of Ilceston Towers, if you are going to dissect that man's history or character."

"I shall try nothing of the sort," she replied gaily, "so you may try and frighten me as much as you like : I said I liked Mr. Landon very much, no one can help it," she continued, "he seems to me to know everybody's thoughts. I can't help being a little

afraid of him, sometimes, he says such extraordinary things."

"Well, I consider George very like him," said her brother.

"What, in face?"

"In features and in character."

"I feel considerably safer with dear George," she replied, with a laugh.

"No doubt you do."

"Tell me, do you believe he was ever married?"

Eustace looked at her in surprise.

"How can I tell, Lilian! I know no more than you do; my father says not, I believe; I did not know it was ever questioned."

"I wonder then he does not," said Lilian.

"And leave the property away from George, I suppose."

"Well, I suppose he would, if—if he had a son," she said musingly.

"I prefer his villa at Twickenham, I think," said her brother, after a pause, "to his other houses: what a stunning place he has made it, to be sure."

"I never was there but to lunch, that day of the river picnic, two years ago," she said, "it seemed to me a little paradise. I wish he had offered it to George instead of Ilceston Towers."

"That would not suit his notions at all, I know," replied her brother; "for countless generations the Landons' bridal-chamber has been in those old grey towers."

Lady Lilian sighed; perhaps the contrast between the gay scene around them at that moment, the laughing sunlight, and the whispering leaves, and the vision of that rocky coast, the yellow woods by the

sea, and the ghost-haunted tapestries of Ilceston, threw a shadow across the bright stream of her thoughts ; perhaps she shrank even then from the sudden severance of home ties, endeared by every crowding recollection of the happy years of girlhood ; but even as she sighed, she smiled to find herself so sadly touched at the coming of the great events to which the days had been so long approaching ; and, turning to her brother with some light question, she sought to change the conversation for the present from the man of whom she really knew so little, though of whom she had heard so much, the man who seemed to be her lover's presiding genius—she would not say his guardian angel, for worlds—namely, the owner of that old castle in the south-west, the host of the bridal-doors, Greville Landon, then a traveller in that sweet sunny Italy, far away.

She asked her brother a hundred questions, and all about George Berthon ; what he thought of him ; what he thought the future hid ; how much he, too, loved her lover. Lord Eustace declared that his fair sister was as clever a cross-examiner as that lover himself, and told her for the hundredth time that he never wished a better friend, nor a more affectionate brother than George Berthon.

Girls of Lady Lilian's temperament always show an eagerness to know all that other folks think of the men they are about to marry. We may pardon her if she would persist in believing that everyone held her own true knight to be as perfect as she did herself. But we linger too long on the history of the old delusion.

The hours that bright September morning were winged ; they galloped for the last time round the

whole park, and passed homeward. As they rode out of the gate, Maurice Fienne drove by. He instinctively reined up his handsome black horse, as he raised his hat to her. He was on his way to pay a visit he would have liked to have postponed for the more agreeable occupation of lunch at his cousin's house. They exchanged a few friendly words, and rode on. Fienne looked over his shoulder at that slender, graceful form, and owned the fascination of the smile upon the sweet face, at which he had declared—long before he had ever heard of George Berthon—he could have gazed for ever. Lilian certainly did look well on horseback, and we need not stop to quarrel with what her dark cousin thought about her figure in its plain riding-habit, or her face.

"That girl," he muttered, as he whipped his thorough-bred into a sharp trot, "is rapturous: how the devil did that sharp lawyer get hold of her, an earl's daughter, and as beautiful as Ariadne, by Jove!"

Then Maurice Fienne remembered that his reflections were slightly flavoured with a very old-fashioned toryism or prejudice at that moment; besides, he thought of Nora, and the recollection of her beautiful eyes as they had met his own that night upon the staircase, and the fact that she at all events was unmarried, somewhat consoled him for the loss of Lady Lilian's smile.

For a long time that afternoon the girls had to entertain a host of visitors, who came, some of them from the country, to see how the preparations for the grand wedding went on, and the arrayed presents, of which there was already a room-full.

Lady Celadon did not go out that day, and when the other girls had gone for a late drive, Lilian found herself alone with her mother, in the little boudoir upstairs.

"Let me rest my head here," she said, settling herself on a stool at her mother's feet, and laying her shining locks on her lap, "it aches rather, and you can rub it with eau-de-cologne for me, dear mother."

The countess smiled at her daughter's serious tone, and proceeded to do as she was wished.

"You will have to get Jane to do this for you when your head aches abroad, my darling," she said.

Lilian endured with closed eyes the delicious sprinkling of that deceptive fluid on her forehead, and was quite happy when she felt the touch of that dear hand upon her hair.

"I'm sure I shall not let Jane do anything of the kind, mamma," she replied.

"Who then?"

"Why, George, of course," said Lilian.

"Indeed, child. Do you imagine that he will approve of the occupation?" her mother returned, very much amused.

"May I not teach him, mamma?"

"Anything in the world that he is willing to learn, my dear. I should, certainly. But I hope your head will not ache; such a young creature as you never ought to be an invalid."

"I want to know, dear mother, whether I must take papa's diamonds with me abroad?"

"I think so, my love; George will like you to be well dressed, and it is very likely you will be asked to some balls at the embassies."

"I thought I should get rid of balls and crowds for a time," said Lady Lilian, sighing.

"What a little unsociable thing you will be," her mother replied, with a laugh. "I shall be quite ashamed to own such a little hermit of a daughter. I believe George is very gay, and he will get tired of you, if you two are to be alone for ever."

"Don't say that, mamma, darling; it makes me quite unhappy."

Lady Celadon bent down and kissed that little anxious face, as she used to years ago, when little childish troubles were brought to that same confessional.

"Nothing that I can say should make you unhappy, my darling girl, because I have the firmest conviction that you will be perfectly happy."

Lilian was comforted, and they sat together in silence for some minutes, both hearts beating with thoughts that sought vainly for expression.

"Don't you wish for Sunday, mother?" she said, after a while.

"Why, my love?"

"Because he will be here again, mamma."

Lady Celadon smiled gravely.

"Yes, my darling, certainly I do; I always love to see the dear boy with you. Your father is fonder of George than ever, I think; he told me this morning that he longed to see the boys all brothers, even though it involved the sacrifice of our little pet here."

"Will there be a great crowd on the day, dear mother?"

"Not more than we counted on, my love."

"Shall I be very frightened, I wonder?" she said.

"Were you, mamma?"

"Not when it came, darling; nor will you be. Your dear father used to say that I held the sceptre like a queen." The countess laughed joyously at the recollection of that sweet long ago. "And, my darling girl must be a bride as bright as she will be fair," she added.

Lilian hung round her mother's neck in mute caresses. Nor could lover's kiss have drawn from those sweet lips a tenderer avowal of affection than they whispered in those beloved ears, as Lady Celadon gently loosened the silken threads that held those last maiden hours. "Lente, lente currite, noctis equi!"



CHAPTER VII.

*"Have you never known the ravage and fire
Of that inexpressible desire,
Which wastes and calcines whatever is less
In the soul, than the soul's deep consciousness
Of a life that shall last for ever?"*

THE WANDERER.

HARLEY GREY found no small difficulty in preserving anything like an intimate and cordial relation with his own family whilst fostering ties, the more obstinately as they were opposed, with those between whom and them there was no, or, if any, the very slightest, acquaintance. There is an everlasting conflict between the force of circumstances and the force of desire. When this conflict in his case came to be fought out, the point at issue, he thought, was the happiness he longed for, but the real result was unhappiness. So he created a world of desire, and

peopled it with shadows, and when he was suffered to roam at will through its bright fields, he was happy ; but when at home, he was not happy. Is it a light thing when home-ties become the well-spring of bitterness to the soul? Remember that even the applause of a senate itself would be silent in one's secret chamber, nor can the consolation of fame follow the prophet into his own country. Dr. Johnson says that "To be happy at home, is the ultimate result of all ambition, the end to which every enterprise and labour tends."

If this be truth, Harley Grey was unfortunate indeed, for he was profoundly ambitious. He loved his mother well enough, but there were few occasions on which it was called forth. Mrs. Grey was too weak-minded, even if she had been a less faithful wife, to leave the safe shadow of her husband's opinions and advice, to follow her son's leading, who was as much superior to his father in mental acquirements as he lacked, in comparison with both him and his elder brother Lawrence, the hardy constitution of body and of mind which enabled them not only to accommodate themselves to the adverse circumstances of fortune which had overtaken them, but also to dispense with that intellectual refinement which was the very life of his being.

For some time he strove hard to raise his sister Lotty to the level of his own tastes, but the ground had lain so long fallow, that he found he was wasting his seed, and was unfortunate enough to believe his affections also, which Lotty might have returned warmly, had he had more patience when she failed to understand his motives or his character. Secretly, both the sisters looked to the young aspirant, to dispel

by his success in life the somewhat insidious shadows which, from Mr. Grey's reverses and their elder brother's conduct, rested upon their home; a home which they were continually wondering was not happy, without perceiving that it was made up of elements which could never assimilate to make it so.

Little Katie was sufficiently young to be ignorant of causes which could produce moody temperaments, or the occasional angry words which terrified her from the lips of those around her; so it was natural that she should cling most where she was loved most, and Harley had never by a word crossed the sunshine of his little sister's happiness. Indeed, it might have been better for Katie had he not lavished such tender endearments upon her. As it was, the child clung to him with an affection which amounted to a passion, and Katie Grey was the centre of Harley's thoughts at home, and the light of his life for years.

Enough has been said to explain the closeness of the friendship which existed between Harley and George Berthon. It was an undivided friendship, for Harley was really too generous to let Berthon's superior advantages ever excite in him any other feeling than a sincere admiration, even if it were at times tempered by a friendly envy. Now that superiority was in the very things he prized most. Berthon had had the advantages of a university education, and the circle of his friends comprised many men of social position and reputation; a connection which, if not brilliant, had at all events helped him on his first entrance into a profession where every step that he rose gave him wider scope for those abilities which had placed him in the short space of three years' practice at the bar in a position in advance of his

contemporaries, and which apparently had so won the esteem of Lord Celadon, that an honourable friendship had given place to a near and dear relationship.

Not one of those steps, once gained, had ever been lost again, and the results were as real and tangible as poor Harley's aspirations were shadows and nothing more. Berthon had robust health, and passed for a distinguished and handsome man; the second consideration might truly be a minor one, but Harley knew his own constitution was weak, and his physique did not stand comparison with his friend's. It was not necessary for him to be aware that others followed his face with much interest; the fire that burned so fitfully within could not but have lighted up those pale and intellectual features. Those whose sensitiveness amounts nearly to a disease are singularly sceptical of the admiration which a fool of ordinary vanity would perceive with his instinct. But if he lacked the social position of his friend, and felt, as he did feel, that a want of physical power was continually reminding him with an unmistakable voice that his body was not equal to the work that his mind planned, there was yet another difference of more moment between Berthon's position and his own; whilst the former enjoyed, through the generosity of his rich relative, a fortune independent of what he made in his profession, Harley himself had struggled for years on a very small allowance. If, therefore, the positions of these two young men were contrasted, it would be seen at once that if they had both set themselves to run the same race, they were respectively very differently weighted. But this was not suggested. George Berthon was the first man who crossed Harley Grey's

path, to teach him that the world was not all made up of isolated selfishness ; for the drift of the latter's mind was to a morbid and premature conclusion in that direction ; a state of mind which it would be more difficult to analyse than to understand, when the conditions under which he made his first acquaintance with London life came to be borne in mind.

Without counteracting influences at hand, an enthusiastic and imaginative temperament fares ill when it comes in rude contact with that world where so little is as it ought to be, and nothing at all as pictured in the imagination, while yet we were—

“ Yearning for the large excitement that the coming years should yield.”

Lofty in principle, unselfish in his character, and imbued with an ambition equal to his own, George Berthon was to Harley the embodiment of his own existence ; he thought that these aims were mutually pure : that there was a wide divergence between their fates did not begin to strike him in its real force until about that period at which this history began.

Harley Grey had conceived very exalted notions of life. Whatever mischief his prejudice or passion at times wrought, be it remembered, in justice to him, that he never debased the standard of principle and action which he had set before him. That he was the slave of the ideal was not quite true, for he was practical enough in the ordinary affairs of life ; but his own experience, and that of himself, was for ever clashing with his lofty conceptions of what he ought to have been. Which of us is there with whom that is not the case ?

When, therefore, Harley did not find in his home

anything to satisfy his craving for happiness, whether that was peace to his mind, or objects on which to lavish his affections, he turned elsewhere. To a mind like his religion offered a tempting solace; when he found its creed so ethereal, and its precepts so noble, he entered with the ardour of a zealot into the realms of its contemplation; it was not until he came in contact with its chief disciples, and contrasted the practice with the theory, that the latent fire of scorn broke out. The fact was, Harley Grey lacked education, and he was not able at that early stage to sever the teaching from the teacher. And that tutelage was the one which we give ourselves. There is no education so difficult, nay, so painful, as that which we seek to raise on the ruins of the schooling forced upon us by others, which the breaking forth of the independent powers of individual thought casts to the winds.

It was no wonder then that the young philosopher failed when he came to bind upon his daily life religious principles with chains of logic; he could not then understand that the very existence of these principles in the soul depended upon conditions beyond the worlds of human experience. Where the application of those creeds ceased to be beautiful, Harley Grey would not believe their origin had been divine.

When a deep horror of hypocrisy comes face to face with pretensions claiming to rest on eternal foundations, but at variance with individual conscience, and repulsive to reason itself, it seldom stops to ask for the credentials of the apostle, and is too apt to confound with its miserable interpretation what may be a revelation from heaven.

Harley Grey had set out in search of truth, and the peril of that journey for him may be conceived, when

he once declared that he had examined the popular beliefs of those among whom he lived, and found them morally below the heathen philosophy. On that road he journeyed alone. Often were the heavens brass, and the earth as iron beneath him. "If I could reach a certain height," he said, "I should find peace." And so he climbed.

True, there was one spot in the history of the past, where his eyes could rest. Long ago, there had lived One who declared He could give the soul to drink whereof it should never be thirsty again. But he could not find His foot-prints in the modern days, and His voice was drowned in the jangle of warring creeds, built up by men in their ignorance and folly and pride on the foundations He laid for them. They who journey eastward under starless skies in time come to the dawn: in this hope Harley Grey worked and waited.

At this time, however, he longed for something to love. If he had a human heart, he thought, to bind to his own with indissoluble ties, he should never feel lonely again. His own home sympathies were not strong enough indeed to fill this void; Katie was a petted darling, a tender plant to train and guard and nourish, but there could be no communion of soul with soul there in those early years; Berthon himself, brother and friend and fellow-worker as he was, could not satisfy that craving, inasmuch as their existence was mutually independent of the other, though mentally the one might supply the wants of the other. Harley sought for love.

If the digression has been long, it may be pardoned as necessary to explain the importance of the change that was at hand, as far as it concerned Harley Grey,

by his friend's marriage. He revered Lady Lillian Celadon as became one of gentle birth, of the sweetest disposition, and who, to him at least, was passing fair : lastly, she was Berthon's choice, and there were not many women he would have married thus early in life. Harley, himself, confessed that he knew little of that world which women reign over. Perhaps he did not consider himself amenable to its laws ; certes, he did not believe in its influence over his own independent will. Now, Harley Grey was a poet. To him it was the natural language of the soul, and if what he had written during his earlier years was not strikingly original, or of the 'force that forges a name,' it was at least the natural expression of much truthful thought, and the absence of effort gave it a power, which was enhanced by the sweetness that seemed to pervade its music. It will readily be understood that much of it was the record of those struggles of mind, and yearnings after satisfaction, which were spoken of above. There was a worship in it, however, shall I say, of an Unknown God ? Perhaps not, in fairness to him ; but as he had not found the proper reflex in the world of his experience of the absolute perfection which he felt was the home of the soul in its immortality, neither believed a very direct earthly medium of its revelation, his poetical imagination soared amid the lights of suns which he was for ever flecking with the shadows of his doubts.

Love, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, was not in those poems, because he had never loved ; but there was a queen somewhere, sitting within a veil and crowned : that being he had never met ; the woman of his desire had her attributes in his writings, but her form was not : and he wrote of women that

he created, because he found without so many whom he cared not to crown.

Such was Harley Grey, his early struggles, his faith, his weakness, and his desires; such was the only work he had yet accomplished, namely, poems that had stirred awhile the dust of praise. If there be many who, having attained unto the tranquillity of the wise, may be disposed to smile either at his troubles, or the pretensions of his philosophy, let them look along the road by which they have arrived at their existing haven: perhaps they are happier if they lack the power to do so, for they may have made the journey blindfolded. It is well for the reed that it leans on its neighbour in the gale.



CHAPTER VIII.

*"Un cœur qui veut aimer, et qui sait comme on aime,
N'en demande jamais licence qu'à soi-même."*

CORNEILLE.

IT was three days before the wedding. Berthon had left the Celadons early, and asked Harley to spend the evening with him; an evening which, however, began somewhere about 10.30 p.m. The wedding day had been fixed for the first of October; it was still fine weather in town; but although he devoutly wished the sun might smile upon his bridal morn, it seemed as if Berthon had contrived to make it as much like winter as he could in his rooms that evening.

When George Berthon left Harrow for Oxford, his uncle, Mr. Landon, had made him an allowance of

three hundred a year, besides paying the expenses of his residence and studies. When he came up to London to read for the bar, he had increased it to five hundred, notifying to him at the time, however, that he expected him to live upon that income like a gentleman, without further assistance in any way, and not to get into debt. If the injunction was couched in terms a little severe, Berthon, nevertheless, did not dispute its fairness, and his tastes or habits had never led him into extravagance. His uncommon success in his profession, slight as it was to what he hoped to attain to, did not, of course, add very materially to his income, and his earnings altogether during his first year of briefs, few and far between, did not exceed the magnificent sum of thirty-five pounds sixteen shillings. As time went on, steady industry and brilliant abilities began to tell, and he was contemplating throwing up his uncle's allowance altogether, when, to his surprise, he received a letter from Mr. Landon, informing him that he had made a settlement upon him of one thousand pounds a year, to be considered as commencing with his twenty-fifth birthday, and expressing a hope that he would accept it as a pledge of affection from one who trusted that it might enable him to be useful in that world whose advantages he was reaping, but to whose wants he was under the obligation of ministering to the best of his power.

From that time he had changed his private residence from the Temple to his rooms in Piccadilly, which he had fitted up tastefully without ostentation, and with every comfort in which he considered he might lawfully indulge, without incurring the charge of needless luxury.

Mr. Landon left him very much to the dictates of

his own inclinations in this, as in most other affairs ; he was ever ready with his friendly advice, when his young relative sought it, but had never forced upon him the obedience to one wish which he thought did not fall in with Berthon's own principles or tastes.

It is not necessary to enter here upon any detailed history of those early years of his life. It would be well, indeed, for many if, amid all the temptations of an independent fortune and a life alone in London, such as had fallen to the lot of George Berthon, they were as happy as he was in the enjoyment of it, and followed as high a code of honour as that by which he used the world without abusing it.

It may be said that he had safeguards which others have not. Intense application to the duties of his profession left him little time to indulge in the thoughtless pursuits which are to so many the entrance-gates to dissipation. His vacations were often spent with his uncle, for whom he cherished a natural affection and warm esteem ; he was fond of travel, and had roamed the continent with the keen delight of a devotee of Art, and with all the enthusiasm of a young student of the men and manners both of his own time and of the centuries that were behind him. At home in London most of his leisure hours were given to study.

That he should be envied by some, flattered by others, and disliked by many, was only natural : the first could not keep back their admiration, no more than the last could cherish a liking for him who was too proud or too independent to accept their leading when they were merely flatterers, and who set light by the friendship they proffered, and treated their dearest pursuits with contempt.

But he loved Harley Grey as a brother ; others who

were his intimate friends and associates we may meet hereafter.

On that evening he had had a fire lighted in his sitting-room, the curtains closed to the street, and the irresistible arm-chairs, already venerable with reminiscences of Christ Church and the still chambers of Crown Office Row, placed on either side of the hearth.

"My dear fellow," he said to Harley, when they had been seated a few minutes, "you look quite pale to-night; take a glass of sherry, it is on the table to the right. You are tired, old boy, and it will refresh you."

Harley smiled at Berthon's tone of solicitude, but he took the wine, for he could not deny that he was fatigued with his walk.

Berthon threw himself back in his chair, and seemed for a time lost in thought. Harley fancied he observed a more than wonted seriousness in the expression of his face, but he did not inquire the cause of it. An involuntary sigh recalled him to the consciousness that he was not entertaining his visitor.

"This day week," he said, abruptly, in the midst of the operation of lighting a cigar, "I shall be living under rather different conditions, Harley. It is really quite sad to think that these rooms will know us no more."

"You are apologetic; children do not regret the transformation scene which transports them from the realms of darkness to light," said Harley, laconically.

"I do not doubt I am a gainer by the change, Harley; nor do I the less anticipate the future because I regret the past."

"How did you leave her to-night, and all of them?" he asked.

"Worn out with a day's work; I cannot conceive

what all these preparations are for. A wedding must be a most infernal nuisance to the house where it takes place. Visitors without end, and milliners more than they," said Berthon who, with legs crossed and head thrown back, was blowing artistic wreaths of blue smoke with the complacent air of one who could favourably contrast his own calm existence with their excitement and bustle.

"I never saw so many presents, nor so many friends," he continued ; "they are legion, and all come with the same preparation of gushing compliment and congratulations. I wonder whether these good people believe to the full extent of what they say, in my excellencies?"

"Those of them who have never had the honour of your acquaintance, perhaps," observed his friend, dryly.

Berthon laughed, and shook the ash off the end of his weed.

"Beautiful in its form, fragrant in its enjoyment, dust in an hour," he observed.

"What are you honouring with an epigram?" asked Harley.

"The whole affair," he replied, relapsing into his old attitude, after the exertion ; "the preparations, the wedding-breakfast, the brilliant crowd, and," he added, "the happy day too ; I cannot help thinking of the morrow in that dear house : imagine the silence of those empty rooms, the ruins of the feast, Harley, and poor Lady Celadon's tears,—Lilian's absence," he said, with an effort.

"Yes, George ; you are right. There will be a great blank, intensified by the events of the day itself. To me, a wedding is a most melancholy business ; not in itself, but afterwards. But that is not your affair," he

added ; " wait till you part with a child, beloved as Lilian is ; now, you will have the sunshine the absence of which will make that house so sad."

" I think you are rather hard on me," said Berthon, smiling at Harley's seriousness ; " you are not one of the bereaved, my dear fellow ; I do not see why they should be so sad if they know she is happy."

" It was you who spoke of Lady Celadon's tears, just now," replied Harley.

" I neither dread nor long for the day," said Berthon, after a pause, without replying to the charge of inconsistency ; " I would wish it to come slowly, that I may look it well in the face."

" And then ?"

" And then,—rout the enemy, and carry her off," he replied, with a laugh, which had the old ring of triumph in it.

" Thirty-six hours, and you will have earned the distinction ; shall I see her again before the day ?"

" They have asked me to bring you to dinner on Wednesday," said Berthon ; " I hope you have no objection ?" he added, quickly, knowing his friend's peculiar fancies.

" I do not know why I should have," Harley returned, with an amused smile, which might have been, however, at his own thoughts.

Both men seemed to find it an effort to talk. George Berthon had many things to say to his friend, and he hardly knew where to begin ; so he relapsed into reverie, and watched dim shadows of the awful day through the medium of the clouds with which he appeared bent upon filling the room, heedless of Grey's coughing, who had finished his weed. There was that certain happy equipoise in his mind as he contemplated

the coming events of the next three days, which makes us equally disinclined to hurry or to delay the slow irrevocable hours.

Harley would have liked to have opened his heart to his friend ; but on the very occasion when he had thought he had most to say, he found when it came that he had least, and that difficult of utterance.

He looked round the room in which they sat together, almost for the last time, with feelings which it was impossible, indeed, to express in words. There was hardly anything there that did not remind him of some one pleasant hour among all of those which had stood out in clear relief from the rest of his life for years. Every picture—from the exquisite Madeleine which hung opposite, the same that had watched over the slumbers of the young, ambitious student, fallen asleep over his books, from the wall of his college-room at night, to the "Sunset over the ruins of Athens," which Berthon had bought from the last year's Academy—repeated to him its history, and its reminiscences of days that were not only for ever gone, but which could never be repeated. The statuettes of "Beatrice" and "Maidenhood," upon either side of the beautiful portrait, the original of which was at Ilceston Towers, that Landon had sent him, telling him that it was his mother, whom he had never seen—the photographic gems they had chosen together,—the books that lay about,—each recalled times, events, conversations, or studies, which he felt would linger in his memory as long as he lived. Berthon was about to enter into a world where he could not follow him. We all of us know, more or less keenly, what it is to see the high windows of the banquet-room flash with the lights, to hear the music rising, and the sound of many

voices within,—while we stand without, and alone, and the door is shut.

It was Grey who first broke the silence again.

"When and where did you first make the acquaintance of Lord Eustace Celadon?" he asked, waking up from a reverie which was not altogether free from melancholy.

"I happened to meet him abroad," replied Berthon, "the year before he came up to Oxford; being his senior there, I might very possibly have known little of him but for that accident——"

"Fate," interrupted Harley.

"Fate, if you will," said his companion. "I met him at Lindau, on the Boden See; we were thrown together on an expedition to the Rhine Valley, without knowing one another's names. On our return to the island-town I found out who he was, and that he was travelling with his tutor, Russell, an Oxford man."

"Is Celadon the family name as well as the title?" asked Harley.

"It is; people get confused by it sometimes. Properly speaking, Eustace is Viscount Lisle, but he is generally called Eustace Celadon. I was going on to say that I had heard of the family before from Landon, who, you know, was a schoolfellow of the earl's."

"It was a very agreeable meeting for you, then?"

"Yes, it was indeed, as it turned out. The boy took a fancy to me: I may say it was mutual, for I had been alone some weeks, and was attracted by that refinement of manner which they all have, and the indescribable gentlemanly air about him, and his conversation, which is so refreshing after rubbing up against every species of the British cad abroad for some six weeks or so."

"Did he become intimate with you then?"

"Pretty well. Gentleman as he was, he never seemed to forget his rank; to this day there is something of the hauteur of the high-born Tory about him, though college life has so modified it that no one could possibly take offence at it."

"Hauteur is a bad ballast in Radical gales, now-a-days," observed Grey, musingly.

"As long as they remain such true men and perfect English gentlemen," returned Berthon, "I will forgive both father and son so much: when manners decline with advancing democracy, I shall despair of England."

He stopped to light another cigar, and then proceeded to tell how he and his new friend had travelled together along the shores of Chalons and Vevay to part at Basel, Eustace Celadon for Italy, and himself up the river, home again.

"When he was gone," continued Berthon, "I found out how much I had become attached to him. I longed to see the family which owned such a son and such a brother."

Harley smiled. "Did you, then, already perceive the threads of the web of that destiny?" he asked.

"If I did, it was a vague curiosity to meet new and interesting people," he replied.

Both were silent again. The clock upon the mantelpiece pointed to midnight; but Harley felt no weight upon his usually tired eyelids that evening; he was waiting for a revelation.

Berthon had turned his chair round, and had drawn across the table to him the gilt miniature frame that stood there, and was attentively examining the painting it contained. It was the lady of his love; a birthday present from Landon the year before. Harley knew

what deep and tender memories were working in his friend's thoughts, as he bent over the likeness of Lilian Celadon; thoughts that took their train from that parting on the upper Rhine, with the brother who had first moved the desire of the young student traveller to see the faces of his fair English sisters. He turned, too, and joined in the silent contemplation of that painter's consummate art. Faithful to the life, there was nothing common-place in the reproduction. It was no full length, standing in the most engaging of attitudes, amid brilliant accessories of furniture or dress, but a plain profile of her head and bust, without an ornament but the single rose in the glossy tresses which floated over the white, delicately-rounded shoulders on to

“ . . . the bounteous wave of such a breast
As never pencil drew.”

The dark-fringed eyes were pensive, and the head slightly averted, and it seemed from the backward motion of the arm that was just seen, as if she were the spirit of a dream passing across the cloudy path, as Astarte floated in Manfred's vision. Often as they had spoken of her beauty, Harley Grey had never learnt the first pages of the history of his friend's love. It was then that Berthon said,

“I have often promised you, Harley, that I would tell you how it was I became engaged to Lilian Celadon. Indeed,” he added, “it was at the time it happened, and for long after, such a strange realization to me, that it always seems like a faintly remembered dream, and has actually come to partake of some of its indistinctness.”

“He kissed the glass reverently, and replaced the

miniature, and then resuming his comfortable easy chair, he laughed lightly at his weakness, and told the tale.

"It was Landon," he said, "who wrote and told me that young Celadon was coming up to Oxford, and he asked me to give him a helping hand in any way I could on his first go in. After that, we became, of course, very fast friends, and I introduced him to several men who were there at the time, and worth knowing. Being an earl's son, there were plenty of fellows, of course, who were anxious and ready to make up to him, but they seemed rather surprised that he did not shed lustre on the peerage by going wild, and still more so when he beat them all at the examinations. Well, the next autumn he asked me down to ——shire, and I went, and was introduced to the family. I was delighted with the earl, who was exceedingly kind to me, and charmed, as you may imagine, with the countess and her daughters. I was very much struck with their beauty, although I had heard a great deal about it in town, and old Trevanion says I am as hard to please in women as the old sinner himself in horses. Well, we got on capitally ; there were a lot of folk there, and hunting and shooting of all kinds, balls and picnics in abundance. I shall never forget my first meeting with Lady Lilian ; she was away when I first went.

"She was only fifteen then ; it seems hardly possible now. We had been out on a picnic all day, and in our absence she arrived, though I did not know she was coming. I happened, before dressing for dinner, to stroll round the conservatory with a weed, as her ladyship had solemnly commissioned me to do her that service there on account of the flowers, when on

opening the door of the dome in the centre, to my great astonishment, I found myself suddenly in the presence of a young lady whom I had never seen before, all alone there, picking camellias in a basket. At first I thought it must be either Lady Nora or Lady Violet, but then I had left them in the garden just before. She must have thought me very rude, child as she was, for I stared at her for some seconds before she heard my footstep. Even then, Harley, she was a lovely creature; you know her glorious hair; it was all down her back, and when she turned her face to me, I knew it must be Lady Lilian, for they had told me of her beautiful eyes. I apologized as well as I could for my intrusion, and introduced myself to her. She did not seem the least confused, told me she was Nora's sister, and where she came from, and allowed me to get one or two of the flowers for her basket, before she ran away, and when I heard her light laugh at some joke I made, and she vanished among the flowers into the house, I really felt almost as though I had seen a spirit.

"Three days afterwards I left for town, and saw no more of the Celadons all that winter. Eustace corresponded with me occasionally, and when he was in London I visited at their house. It was not very long before I found that I was very fond of going there; I did not believe at the time that it was the attraction of the young ladies; indeed Lady Ernestine was pretty well then the property of young Poitiers, and as for Nora, she invariably snubbed me as far as she could. I saw little of the other two. It was the earl himself who fascinated me; there was such an absence of constraint in their society, and a total want of that hateful cant of aristocracy, if you know what I mean, which

reminds people of the respectful distance they are to observe. I found Lord Celadon a man of the most cultivated and refined tastes, and of the keenest intellect; conversation with him was delightful, and he drew me into his confidence by his irresistible art of manner, and the generous sentiments he professed. Of the countess I need not speak; you know what I always thought of her. I found out soon there was danger to me in that continued society. The earl was then President of the Council in Lord A—'s ministry, and although when Eustace was there I always knew I was welcome, I felt that I was being drawn into a world where I had no part to play, and was losing sympathy with poor old Vernon's dusty chambers and papers. For all London sought invitations to the Celadons, and what had I to do with ministers or politics, much less the tempting gaieties of the season? Indeed, the earl himself was of a school whose doctrines I could not accept in their integrity, and as I had no right to assert objections, I felt, in the long conversations he honoured me with, that I was gaining a confidence which was in partial antagonism to my independence. Well, I went less often, and read harder. When the autumn came round, there was always the usual invitation to King's Lisle. Eustace travelled with me, and made a fuss whenever I tried to persuade him that my proper sphere was Lincoln's Inn.

"It was about this time that I went to pass a few weeks with them at Nice, and here it was that I first found out how great a fascination there was to me in Lady Lilian's society. She did not seem so conscious either of rank or beauty, as she did of mental ability, and her inquiring mind and thirst for information led

me to be her constant companion. I admired her immensely, but in that way, Harley, where one persuades oneself, by the most unconscious subtilty in the world, that the friendship is too real and too dry, if I may say so, to touch upon the imaginative and shadowy realm of a tenderer passion. Burke says that *clearness* helps but little towards affecting the passions, and is indeed an enemy to all enthusiasms ; and there was a clearness between me and that child—she was but eighteen then, by-the-bye—through which all objects were visible. If I was unconsciously forging chains for myself, neither her father or mother seemed to perceive it, or, if they did, they made no sign. How could I abuse their friendship and confidence ? Even when I found out my own heart, Harley, I could not stoop to insinuate love through the guise of a permitted friendship. I believe Eustace saw something, and he has told me since that it was the wish he cherished most. I was indeed not worthy of all this ; but I did not weave my own fate.

“Those happy days slipped unconsciously away. As to Lilian, I was her constant companion in riding about the country, and as the time was short, I was not, I am afraid, sufficiently strong-minded to resist drinking deeply of that fascination before leaving her, as I then persuaded myself, to cast away the fetters. Even then, I little thought what a work had been going on. I was supremely happy : those weeks were an oasis in one’s life. The earl had been quite knocked up with the Session, and took such rest as we could all share together ; he was kindness itself, and I acted almost for the time as his secretary ; but I feel sure that Eustace must have had great influence with his parents, for them to confer such an exceptional favour

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upon me, as to let me become one of the family, as it were, during my stay.

"The time came for parting, and I can never think now of that homeward journey, and my first month again in England, without shuddering. What would my fate have been, if the anguish I suffered then had been all realized!"

Berthon rested his face upon his hands, and remained silent for a space. When the passing emotion subsided, he resumed in a cheerier tone,

"I loved her then ardently, and had the fullest conviction that I had allowed myself to drift into a hopeless passion. But my chief sorrow was for her. It is useless and unworthy now, Harley, to conceal the fact that I thought she cared for me, though it were — but never mind, I won't define it; who could? A month later they all returned. That new year was important. Lilian *came out*, as the modern cant has it, and I myself was called to the Bar. Twelve months later Lady Ernestine was married to Viscount Poitiers.

"I cannot describe to you all I went through, that year. You may imagine the sensation in certain circles when it was known that poor Lilian was launched into society. Men raved about her beauty, but they could not get her to flirt, and I heard at least half a dozen reports of her engagement. Lord Avendon—you know him, a reckless, profligate boy, though heir to B——, and generally looked upon as a catch, (heaven forgive him and his would-be mother-in-law!) fell desperately in love with her, but the earl would not hear of it; I need scarcely say that Lilian was not 'gone' in that direction. I kept away as much as I could. Vain delusion! I worked like a

slave, and cajoled myself into the belief that I did not care for her. Somehow or other they got hold of me at a dinner party in July, when Lilian swept away all my self-education of months, and when I met her riding the next day, I thought she looked unhappy. You will understand how I was placed: I really had not the audacity to aspire to her, not on unworthy grounds, for I hold that a man may win any woman in the world, but he must win position first, and I was a student on the threshold of life. I had no thought of marrying for many years; I always determined I would never be beholden to my wife for my place in the world; but it is not worth while to talk now of things that are all changed. I spent the autumn with Landon, and studied philosophy with him, or rather he drew with me a scheme for that purpose. When the spring came, I began to get work, and all I remember of that year is my deep delight that Lilian remained unmarried, and that the Celadons were still unchanged toward me. Eustace and I were a great deal together, and he insisted on my going periodically to King's Lisle. I did not even then imagine how near the end was. You know me too well, Harley, to think that I was in love with Lilian's beauty, and not herself. I did, indeed, always think, and still do so, that my darling child's face was the sweetest—

“ ‘That ever looked with human eyes.’

“But there was that wonderful sympathy between us that led me to believe that all I wanted was her love, her esteem, and her help, to make me perfectly happy. I longed to train her thoughts, always wandering, and always deep, to those views of life which

possessed the greatest aspect of truth to my own mind. I imagined I could aid her to that happiness which I felt, God knows how deeply, she could bestow upon myself. Be that as it may, I thought of no one else, and gave myself up at last to the full sway of a passion I found it impossible any longer to resist. I may have been wrong: I knew I was weak, but who then are the strong ones of this world?

"I was stopping at the time at King's Lisle. In a thousand ways I knew that Lilian cared for me more than I dared to confess to myself. It is no paradox to say that it was a knowledge as wildly sweet to me as it was fraught with pain. You will ask why I went down there. I went to prove myself once for all. If it was true that the unconscious influence of a devotion, however distant it might be, had communicated itself to her, was it right or honourable to leave her without a word? Without some understanding between us, to meet was intolerable, and the conditions of mere friendship impossible any longer; and I had, indeed, no reason to give to Lord and Lady Celadon, who never wavered in their intimate relations with me, or Eustace, who looked upon me like a brother then. Well, I went, and this is what happened.

"I had been there a fortnight, and felt every day that without Lilian, I did not care any more to live. What she felt or thought, I have no right to say; who can describe the alternate happiness and torture of love that consumes within itself, or who can understand it, having never experienced it? I drove her home with Aubrey and Nora from Norman Castle; these two left us at the lodge to go across the orchard, and Lilian and I went round by the garden. I told her that I should leave them in a few days, as Landon

had written to me that morning. I could see that she was troubled. Poor girl ! I had felt all the afternoon the unutterable longing to tell her all ; indeed, she must have felt in every word I said, that I was labouring under a fever. She held out her hand at the gate, and laughed when I said that I dreaded my return to London.

“ ‘ How can life be weary to a man,’ she said, ‘ and yours of all men !’

“ ‘ Why do you except me ?’ I asked.

“ ‘ Because I do not suppose,’ she answered, ‘ that there is anything in the world you could not have, if you made up your mind to win it.’

“ I knew my voice faltered when I said to her what I would have recalled when it was too late ; I remember every word—

“ ‘ Ah, Lady Lilian ! what would all the world, and its wealth or its fame be to a man, without the light of the sun to lighten it ? There is a song, which if a man once hears, it passes so deeply into his soul, that he would roam unhappy through the fields of Paradise, till he heard it again.’

“ ‘ An earthly song, I fear,’ she said.

“ ‘ A human voice, perhaps,’ I replied.

“ Our eyes met. I saw the deep flush rise in her sweet face, and I knew that there was now no return. She wrung my hand, and vanished.

“ I made up my mind to see the earl : but thought I would wait awhile. We are all the creatures of impulse ; perhaps the best acts and the soundest in our lives are those that proceed on the thought that determines us as suddenly as it flashes through the brain. I determined to see him at once. I found him in his study. Lord Celadon was too well-bred to affect sur-

prise at my intrusion ; but he must have observed something, for it was not until I was in his presence, that the full realization of my position rushed upon me. I strove to be calm, and took the chair he motioned me to. Then I began. I told him how much I honoured the friendship and esteem of himself and his family ; how unconsciously my past life had become influenced by them, and how keenly I should feel the least disturbance to that happy union. I enlarged upon my position, my relations with my uncle, my hopes, my ambition to excel, and the principles I thought I should have been able to guide my life by. Indeed, I spoke to him more as to my father than as a suitor for his daughter's hand. Then I spoke of Lilian. All this time he never interrupted me by a word. I told him of the esteem I had always cherished for her, and confessed deeper feelings that had sprung up since ; I said how long and how hopelessly I had struggled against it, and how she had become the one desire of my life. I thought it due to the earl to describe to him my present position with regard to her, and I shewed him how impossible it was that I should abuse his confidence by speaking to her of love, unknown to one to whom I owed so much. I told him that I felt unworthy of her, but could not live any longer under the weight of a hopeless and silent attachment. Then I said that he had only to say the word and I would leave her for ever ; I had never bound her by any tie that her own heart had not made for itself ; true, the future might give me hope that one day I might ask for her hand with confidence : I only then wished to know whether I might face that future with the knowledge that he would sanction the dearest and holiest aspiration of my life.

"In the brief silence that followed my appeal to him, of which I only tell you the substance, I felt the suspense of the condemned man that waits for a doubtful reprieve.

"At length Lord Celadon rose from his chair; he took my hand, and in his kindest tones, he told me how much he sympathized with me. Speaking of my position and prospects, he said that I had no need to speak of the contingencies of years to come, and in words which will ring in my ears till I die, he declared to me, Harley, that there was no one in the world from whom he would have listened to the avowal I had made with more satisfaction, or to whom he more confidently and gladly committed Lilian's happiness and welfare than to myself.

"A sudden light seemed to illumine the horizon, and my joy was so sudden and so intense that I could not reply one word. I only grasped his hand, and murmured a few inarticulate syllables; I did not believe till then that my self-possession could ever desert me so completely. Lord Celadon said he understood my feelings, and very considerably he did not press the conversation.

"I found my darling in the garden. She was in an arbour in the shrubbery, where we had often read in the evenings with the others. I saw that the poor child had been crying. The pent-up passion of years found utterance then in words which are beyond recall. In telling Lilian how much I loved her, I begged her to take time to consider well the future I offered. There had been no need of a lover's fearfulness, or suspense. Why should I disguise it; I knew, of course I knew, as every man can know, whether she loved me: I knew that she loved me, Harley, and

this is why I said I wished her to think over all I had to say. Poor Lilian broke down; she laid her beautiful head upon my shoulder, and cried like a child. Then I asked her whether she thought she could become the wife of a man who had little in common with others; I meant the work I had set myself to do. I told her of the conditions of that life, and how little I had to offer that other men bring; how little of the world's pleasures I had part in, and many wild utterances of my desires for the future. Then came a great calm, Harley. Passion had gone, when I kissed her pale cheeks, and left her. I need not dwell on what happened later: you know it all. I had an interview with the countess afterwards, and she met me with such perfect candour, and with that delicate tact which only women learn, that I felt no reserve in confiding in her. She told me that she had known of our attachment, and that nothing had made herself and the earl so happy for a long time.

"You may imagine what my feelings that evening were. Our engagement was announced to all the family, and Eustace was beside himself. It is all a story of the past now, and I have wearied you with so much about myself: if a man is not egotistical in his love, I do not, indeed, know when he is. It is late, and time that you should be at rest. This is, indeed, a wonderful destiny for me: I tremble to think, Harley, that I should ever prove myself unworthy of Lilian Celadon."

"If you are as happy as you will be successful, George," said Grey, "your life should be long to bear so much of good. I will never fail you, as long as you are true to Lilian, and to England as to her."

"Be that the criterion," Berthon replied with a joyous laugh, "come, it is time to let these fevered pulses rest."



CHAPTER IX.

*"The dearest friend, the kindest man,
The best conditioned and unwearied spirit—
In doing courtesies."*

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

IT was the last day of September. Towards sunset two young men were walking slowly arm-in-arm down the long drive in the park. The heavy-laden trees had done their duty for the year, but as yet the avenger, the north wind, slept in the frozen zones. The cloud world of the West was on fire; great banks of azure and gold lay around the horizon, and rolled like breakers into the still fields of the creeping evening shadows. There was a soft wind sighing, but few other sounds. They had chosen the place and the hour for their stroll that they might be alone. Far-off indeed rolled the sullen thunder of the ceaseless wheels, and now and then a solitary carriage, or a horseman, passed by. The handsome Newfoundland dog which belonged to one of them walked in measured steps beside his master, as if partaking of his gravity, and would from time to time raise his head, and lick the hand that caressed him.

Both were men in the prime of life, seemingly of equal age, and of that unmistakable dress and appearance that bespoke them members of the upper classes

of London life. There is no age when seriousness and cheerful humour at once sit more naturally on the features, or the conscious strength and glory of life rests easier, like a graceful garment, on the frame than that boundary line between the matured experience of manhood and the joyous freshness of youth ; that one decade of existence in which mingle every stream that contributes to the mere enjoyment of life for its own sake, where are the workshops in which, if ever, the mind forges the works of life, and resolves into form and completeness the confused stores of knowledge. One grown grey in the service of the world could not meet those friends in their walk, and look upon their handsome faces and manly forms without some such reflection as this :—" Unhappy is he who is deluded into the belief that the ultimate reward of restless toil and troubled scheming will compensate him when they come for the loss of the light heart, the elastic step, and the bounding pulses, which he despised for their sake, because he had only the large possessions of early manhood."

" You remember that evening at Bregenz, and the walk in the garden ?" said one.

" I do indeed, as though it were yesterday ; how seriously we slipped into a common train of thought : did we not discuss Plato's republic and the perfection of man ?"

" Something of the kind," replied the other, laughing. " Nothing strikes us so much on looking back as the slow development of thought, the wonderful and unconscious change of opinions in the boy and the man. I remember the most violent enthusiasms for objects which scarcely rouse an interest now, but I doubt whether we ever adopt the later theories

with half the genuineness of those hearty convictions."

"I can understand now," returned the other, "how easily a young man fresh from the schools, however strong-minded he may be, can be drawn away by those who have already added a life's experience to great powers of persuasion. It seems to plain and simple people a shocking thing to say, but it is an undeniable fact that every year one lives one ceases to believe in some article of faith of early years."

"You speak of common things," said his companion, "and you are right; the unsettling of the mind by these displacements—for we never lose anything, but merely substitute—causes pain sometimes and doubt. It is then that a powerful reason has most influence; and, as you say, it is then disciples are made. Such is the secret of the absorbing power of the Romish faith. We are driven about on the sea of speculation, and here is a haven which offers security and rest; the guise of clever sophistry conceals the awful truths that become clear afterwards; the drug is welcome, and the charm potent. It is not till we wake in the cold light of morning that we perceive our ethereal dreams to be tinsel, our angel from heaven a carved block, and our worship an idolatry."

At that moment a phaeton passed them at a rapid pace.

"Fienne," said the last speaker.

"And who is with him?" asked George.

"His sister," replied the other, returning the lady's bow.

"What a handsome girl she is, Eustace."

"He lives down this way; it reminds me, by-the-bye, that it is almost time to turn back. They dine

with us to-night, and are going home to dress, I suppose. Catherine Fienne is to be one of the bridesmaids."

"Is she not a Catholic?"

"Yes; it is a singular thing; Fienne is nominally a Protestant, himself. Their mother was a Catholic; and Lord Fienne a Dissenter, and this is the reproduction of the anomaly. You heard the news this morning, I suppose?"

"No; what about?"

"Old Fienne, his cousin, the member. There was a paragraph in the *Times*, about it. He is said to be failing in health, and is ordered abroad; he is over sixty, and it is thought probable he will retire."

"Indeed! that will give Fienne a seat in the house, I should think?"

"Probably," said Lord Eustace, "unless it is contested."

"I should not think any one would contest it with a shadow of a chance, would they?"

"There has long been a split down in Lingwoodshire, but I don't know how matters stand a present."

They walked on for some minutes in silence. Then Berthon said—

"I had almost forgotten that I put a letter in my pocket to show you!"

"From whom?"

"Landon. His letters have a strange charm about them; I should like you to see this one. Sometimes he seems as hard as iron, at others, all tenderness and affection. He is said, you know, to possess the power of moving to tears almost at will. I begin to think I know no more of him now than when I was a boy."

"You describe him exactly as my mother does," said Lord Eustace; "but he can never be hard to you."

"No," replied Berthon quickly, "he is too kind, too generous to me. I sometimes could wish, but for Lilian's sake, that I did not owe him so much, particularly in the matter of the house: I did not wish to live in Park Lane."

"Why, my dear fellow, it would belong to some one else; if it is his own, and he never lives there, why should you not have the benefit of it?"

"Well," said Berthon, as he gave him the letter. "I certainly could not refuse it, and as you say, it is his own."

"And will be yours."

George smiled. "I am not so sure," he said, and then, "Come, you have just time to read it: let us sit down for a few seconds."

They seated themselves beneath the trees where in the early summer they had so often watched the brilliant throng whom shadows of coming autumn days had already frightened and scattered away as the insect world vanishes from the flower-beds of June. Berthon bent forward and traced vague figures in the gravel with his walking-stick, thinking of the writer in the distant South, whilst Jack, whose proper name was Rover, curled his splendid tail around him, and sitting on his haunches opposite, inquired as well as he could with his sad and tender eyes what he was thinking about.

Lord Lisle, as we ought more properly to call Eustace Celadon, leant back, and ran his eye quickly over Landon's letter.

It was dated from Florence, and ran thus:—

"MY DEAR GEORGE,

"I could not allow the day of your marriage to arrive without a few lines from me. Though I am deprived of the pleasure of being with you, to witness the recording of those solemn vows which will commit to your charge for life one of the fairest and best of women, I shall endeavour to persuade myself that mutual thoughts on that day will lessen the distance between us. I think of you much, my dear boy, and my most earnest wishes for the lasting happiness and welfare of you both attend you everywhere! You will tell your bride that I shall welcome her with so much the more pleasure and affection that she fills a place in my thoughts and heart which has never been occupied before; I shall regard her as a beloved daughter, and shall look forward to the delight of receiving her as such, when my health and other circumstances shall permit me to see England again. In the meantime it will give me constant gratification even to know that you will teach her to keep a place in her heart for me till I shall see her for myself. When this letter reaches you, you will be standing on the very threshold of a world new and strange to you. If my slight efforts for your happiness, which you so gracefully, but I do assure you unnecessarily, dwell upon in your last welcome letter, shall have in any way been conclusive to that end, it is indeed an ample return to me. I call them slight efforts, though they were sincere, because the chief and most real happiness is that which a man confers upon himself by seeking the possession of those things which make life worth living; possessions which it is in the power of no one to bestow, but of attaining which God has

given every man the faculties. I have therefore, my dear George, but endeavoured to point out to you what paths I thought, on an anxious study of your boyhood, you would find most pleasure in, as well as prove yourself most useful. I have no doubt you will build rapidly and successfully on foundations the sureness of which your own intellect and conscience are by far the best judges.

"You say you are happy; you ought to be, and I trust the future will ever increase it, as you steadfastly cultivate the opportunities which you will have. In Lord Celadon and his family you have a relative who will always do you honour, and a domestic circle in whose society you can never fail to find the most delightful attractions.

"You will give my affectionate love to your beautiful bride. I know you will ever remain true to her. As she esteems you so she will love you, and in your mutual affection you will find a happiness the world could not give, as it cannot take away. Cherish her as your surest counsellor, your sweetest repose, and your best prize. My present to her I wish you to give the evening before the wedding. My jeweller has instructions to deliver it to yourself; by this time you will doubtless have received it. It is a very beautiful diamond star, which I have always reserved for your bride, George. It is a precious relic to me of days that exist now but in hallowed memories, but its preciousness will be increased and my pleasure in it by your wife's acceptance of it, though, perhaps, lover-like, you will not think the brilliancy of the gems, when Lilian honours me by wearing them, worthy of comparison with her own sweet eyes.

"I shall be glad to hear that you find the house in

Park Lane comfortable ; I lived in it for some years a long time ago. It is rather small, but will suffice for your wants for the present, and you need not hesitate to leave it any time, if you prefer another.

"It would be necessary for me to end my long letter, even if you had the inclination to read lengthy epistles just now, which I do not suppose you have. I sympathise with you in your desire to get through the ordeal of the day ; you will find it less formidable in experience than anticipation. Unless I am mistaken, you will have far too much to engross you in your attentions to your bride to fall a prey to self-reflection.

"Accept, then, my dear George, the assurance of my deep interest in your present and future welfare, as well as of that affection in which you and yours will ever have so large a share. The want of money, the cause of many of the anxieties of life, though I firmly believe the spring of much of its practical wisdom, I trust you will not experience ; let then your abilities work freely. It is true, that even in earthly things there is a love that passes the love of women, but still the pure love of such a wife as yours cannot fail to be ennobling as I feel certain it will minister to your daily and lifelong happiness. I hope you will find your rooms at Ilceston Towers all you desire. I shall think of you there with pleasure.

"God bless you, my dear boy ; my heart and hope is with you both.

"Believe me to be,

"Very affectionately yours,

"GREVILLE LANDON."

"A charming letter," said Eustace, as he returned it to his friend, "it must be very gratifying to you."

"It is, indeed. I only wish he were to be with us to-morrow. I think it will please Lilian, who stands rather in awe of him; I will show it to her this evening. Shall we go?" he said, rising.

They strolled back along the drive. Lord Eustace relapsed into a silence which Berthon did not interrupt, in recalling some passages of the letter that had filled him with curiosity and wonder.

"I never could understand," he observed at length, "how Landon could remain unmarried; no one, it seems to me, thinks so much of women and their influence."

"I am afraid I cannot help you to understand him," replied Berthon, "he is a mystery to myself."

As they approached the corner where they were to separate, he said—

"I shall find Grey at my rooms, I hope, and bring him with me, and my uncle's present to Lilian. Who dines with you to-night besides those I know?"

"It is such a large party, that I forget all their names. I believe Col. St. Leger, Sir Hugh Delessert, and Brereton are of the party, and some come in the evening. You don't want the ladies, I suppose?"

"No," he said with a smile, "not to-night. I hope your father will let me off making speeches; it is a short respite till to-morrow, and I don't feel equal to the task at all."

"I don't know that he will; he sticks to the old fashions in these matters. Never mind, you have only to say that the ladies are with you, and cynics will be silenced. By-the-bye, I forgot, Reginald Selwyn dines with us too. You know him, of course?"

"Yes, slightly ; he will assist in church to-morrow. I would it were all over for Lilian's sake. I shall not get much chance of another chat with you, Eustace," he added as they shook hands, "you will promise me to come round in the morning."

"Certainly, my dear fellow ; I and Grey will look after you."

"That is, unless there are prior claims elsewhere."

"Where should that be ?"

"Is there none among the bridesmaids to command Lord Lisle's fealty for the day ?" he said, laughing.

"None but my own sweet sisters," he replied, and a momentary shade, which Berthon traced to thoughts of some one absent, passed over his handsome face.

But he asked no further question, and they parted. As he entered his lodgings, he found his servant waiting for him.

"Well, Hargreaves," he said, "you look serious, what is it ?"

"Nothing, sir, but that you're late, and it would not be right."

"Why ?"

"Why, sir !" he said with astonishment, "because it's to be a grand affair, Mr. Berthon, and every one will be thinking of you and Lady Lilian, of course."

"For heaven's sake, don't, Hargreaves ! Do you wish to frighten me out of it already ? Come, help me to dress. Is Mr. Grey here ?"

"He is, sir, has been here half-an-hour, and reading like a book. He looks very pale to-night, sir."

"Give him some brandy, Hargreaves ; I shall want some myself I expect."

As he passed the door of his sitting-room, he saw Harley in one of his arm-chairs, so deep in a book

that he did not even turn round. He did not disturb him, and went into his own room, where his faithful servant, who had been with Mr. Landon for years before he was deputed to attend Berthon when he settled in town, did all he could to impress upon his young master the necessity of hastening his toilet, much amusing him at the same time with a running commentary on the great importance of the events which were impending, and the duties which devolved upon himself in connection with them.

An open portmanteau lay on the floor, half packed for travelling, and every article in the room seemed turned out of its place.

"Leave me my writing things out, Hargreaves," he said, surveying the rout, "I shall want them when I come back to-night. All the books, except those I wrote down, and the pictures and everything we don't take with us will be left in their places."

"The dust will ruin them, sir."

"Never mind, I can't sit and look at bare walls. You can do what you like to-morrow morning. They will be sent to Park Lane this week. Get me a tie."

"It's ready for you half an hour ago, sir," said Hargreaves reproachfully. Indeed, whenever he could complain of his master's unpunctuality, which was not often, he fixed upon half an hour as the least space of time he could take notice of.

"What do you mean by sitting and looking at bare walls, sir?" he asked after a brief silence.

"Mean; what do you suppose? What I say, of course."

The man was not to be silenced thus, so he proceeded gravely—

"You don't mean to say that you're going to sit up late to-night, Mr. Berthon?" Now Hargreaves had sundry reminiscences of this kind of thing which had already served as texts for similar sermons to that which Berthon forthwith expected.

"I don't suppose I shall get much sleep," he answered, coolly adjusting his cravat.

"Why, sir, there ain't anything for you to do."

"That shows how much you know about it," he replied.

"I shall pack everything myself," said Hargreaves stoutly. "You ain't going to pack, Mr. Berthon?" he added.

"No, but I've a great deal to think about, Hargreaves.

"Think about, sir! I thought you had done all that by this time. It's very wrong of you, Mr. George, and you won't be fit to be married."

Berthon laughed loudly at his servant's solemn face, which brought in Harley from the adjoining apartment.

"Now then, Hargreaves," he said, after greeting his friend, "bring me Mr. Landon's present from my dressing bag."

The discussion on the beauty of those superb diamonds cut short any further moral sentiments which his servant had in keeping for him.

"Will her ladyship wear them to-night, sir?" he inquired.

"Perhaps, if I get there in time to give them to her; see about a hansom for us."

When Hargreaves returned, and ought to have been handing Berthon the overcoat he held on his arm, he moved nervously about with his hand in his side

pocket, with the air of one who had something very serious on his mind.

"Well, Hargreaves, what's up now, are you looking for the coat you have in your hand?" asked Berthon impatiently.

There was no answer, but a rustling of tissue paper, and a sudden jerk of Hargreaves' hand from the recesses of the pocket.

"Please, sir," he said at length, "I've had it in my mind weeks to present you with—a present, Mr. George; but I couldn't presume, you see, sir, to present Lady Lilian with, nor you alone, Mr. George; so I thought of something, sir, that would do for you both."

In the pause that ensued, Berthon took out of its careful folds a handsomely mounted silver flask, his astonishment at the appearance of which quite frightened poor Hargreaves.

"Why, it's a brandy-flask!" exclaimed Harley, "and look, George, here's your crest and monogram, twined up with Lilian's, as I live!"

"I heard you say, Mr. George," interposed his servant hurriedly, "how that you could never replace that one you lost from your bag, sir; but I thought I'd have a try, and, maybe you'll both find it useful on the journey, Master George, particularly at the Towers!"

"Very well, Hargreaves," replied Berthon, who could not refrain from laughing heartily at the idea of Lilian's monogram and his own being on the flask, "I am sure I am immensely obliged to you, and thank you more than I can say; I dare say," he added, as he shook the old servant warmly by the

hand, "that Lady Lilian will appreciate the gift as much as I do."

Hargreaves sought the refuge of the staircase as soon as ever he could, and hurried his master into the cab; as he shut the flap, he said, however—

"I shall try and come round and see her wear it, to-night, Mr. George, with my respects to her ladyship."

"What, the brandy-flask, Hargreaves?"

"No, sir, them diamonds," he replied indignantly; but they had rattled off before Mr. George could apologize.

"I don't know now," he muttered, as he re-ascended the stairs, "whether I did quite right about that there flask; howsom'ever, Master George will use it, I know, and the liquor won't taste the worse that her name is outside, I guess, and old Hargreaves gave it 'im." With which complacent reflection, that invaluable servant set to work to complete the devastation of Mr. George's dressing-room.



CHAPTER X.

"If any man love, he knoweth what is the cry of this voice."

THOMAS A KEMPIS.

WHEN George Berthon and his friend arrived, they found the room full of guests. Most of them were relatives, or intimate friends, whose welcome presence the earl and countess held indispensable on such an occasion. As Harley Grey was to fill the official capacity of a groomsman on the morrow, he found

himself at once accosted by Lady Celadon, who up-braided Berthon for not coming earlier.

"I wanted to have a quiet chat with you, George," she said, laying her hand affectionately on his arm; "there may be some things in the arrangements to-morrow morning in which you would like us to meet your wishes?"

"My dear Lady Celadon, I have such perfect faith in your genius in that direction, that I should be afraid to mar your plans by a single suggestion."

"This is a new phase of his humility," exclaimed Lady Nora, who came up at the moment: "is it possible that Mr. Berthon has nothing to dictate to us women?"

"When you come to experience the noviciate, Lady Nora," he replied, "may the painful consciousness of your helpless position afford your friends a similar harmless amusement!"

"Ah! that is severe," she said, with a toss of her beautiful head. "When I take the veil, I will decide whether I shall make you my confessor."

With this reproof she passed on. Harley's eyes roamed round the room in search of Lady Lilian; he saw her coming from the little conservatory at the farther end towards them. A slight flush of nervous anxiety seemed to have heightened the colour of her cheeks; he even thought that recent tears had left their traces about the eyes which brightened with pleasure when they met those of her lover, who advanced to meet her. Yet she looked very lovely, in her plain white silk dress, whose ample folds about her graceful form were caught into festoons by bunches of flowers; there was a single camellia in the luxuriant coils of the hair that flowed from her

placid forehead, and on her snowy breast the red rose and delicate fern which Berthon had sent her in the morning, to wear that night. The pearl cross glittered on her neck, and Harley saw with pleasure that she wore in her ears his own present to her.

"We are waiting for Admiral and Lady Delessert," said the Countess, when the greeting was over; "and George wants us to come into my boudoir for a minute. We ought to make him keep his secret till afterwards, but for once we will forgive him; come, child, I believe I hear Sir Hugh's carriage."

Lady Celadon led the way out of the room, and Berthon followed with Lilian.

Harley found himself alone, when he was addressed by a voice he thought he knew.

"You seem to have forgotten me, Mr. Grey; how are you?"

He looked round and recognised the frank face and genial smile of Colonel St. Leger.

"I don't think we have met many times before," said Harley, as they shook hands; "I wonder you knew me."

"That depends upon the occasions on which we have seen each other," returned the Colonel, who remembered with interest a certain flashing irony and strong partisanship in some discussions over dessert, and in the smoking-room downstairs. "The ladies are looking very brilliant to-night," continued St. Leger; "how very handsome Lady Celadon's daughters are. I consider Berthon the most fortunate man in London. I met Stanley-Morton at my club this afternoon—heir to a baronetcy and twenty thousand a-year—who told me he had worshipped Lady Lilian for years."

"Did he seem very unhappy?"

"Not very, under the circumstances; he said he should propose next Sunday to the second on his list," the Colonel replied, laughing. "I only hope she has a double allowance of common-sense, for I think poor Stanley is a little deficient. But let that pass; here comes Sir Hugh Delessert; tell me, what do you think of his daughter?"

The Admiral was a distinguished man. He had linked his name with England's history, and had been happily as successful in action, when opposed to the enemy's guns, as he was by repute among the fair ladies at home, under the fire of eyes which he never encountered but to fascinate, nor engaged without success. Lady Delessert was one of those happy women who was too full of admiration for her husband to wonder at other people's partiality for him, and never troubled herself at the attractions of others, because she knew she excelled them all in his estimation. She had passed the prime of life; but, although she had never been handsome, the extreme sweetness and bright intelligence of her expression gave to her face a charm that mere beauty of feature cannot impart. She was one of Lady Celadon's most intimate friends, and Sir Hugh served in the same administration with the Earl.

At Colonel St. Leger's question, Harley turned to observe them.

"You mean," he said, "that very graceful girl in the black and gold dress? she has a beautiful figure, but I do not admire her much—do you?"

"I think you would if you knew her; she is a great favourite: she has seated herself by Lady Nora at the table—you can see her face better now."

"She seems to me to be rather thin and pale," said Harley; "is she considered clever?"

The Colonel smiled.

"I really could not venture to decide such a delicate point as that; Lady Delessert, her mother, is one of the most witty and fascinating women in London. As she is to be one of the bridesmaids tomorrow, you will have the opportunity of satisfying yourself of Miss Delessert's attractions."

At that moment Marion raised her eyes, and their looks met.

"Interesting-looking: nothing more," he said to himself, as he turned to Eustace, who came up to introduce him to a lady on the other side of the room.

"Who is that man talking to Colonel St. Leger, with the fair moustache and delicate features?" asked Marion Delessert.

"You know him well," said Lady Nora, with a quiet smile.

"No I don't, dear; do tell me who it is. I think he is so nice-looking."

"You know him better than I do; for to my certain knowledge you have read that book of his through and through—that one on the table next to you—"

"You don't mean to say that it is—Harley Grey!" said Marion, taking into her hand a handsomely-bound volume of poems that lay near her, and turning to the title-page, which bore the name. O, Nora—I can't believe it!"

"Why not, you silly child! there is nothing very wonderful in it. We like him very well; I think you would get on with him; but he is very unpoetical to talk to. I shall introduce him to you."

Marion's large soft eyes looked incredulous as to this last point ; she hastily laid down the book, which, it was true, she had promoted to a post of honour in her private book-case at home, and she felt a cruel flush tingle in her cheek as Nora rose and crossed over to where Harley Grey was standing.

"I want to introduce you to Miss Delessert, Mr. Grey," Lady Nora said, "a very great friend of ours, and one of Lilian's bridesmaids."

"Certainly," he replied. "We are not altogether strangers, Miss Delessert," he said, addressing Marion. "I have heard your name so constantly, that it is an additional pleasure to me to have the honour of knowing you personally."

Harley Grey, naturally of a nervous disposition, had, notwithstanding, the art of being at ease with new acquaintances, and more particularly when they were women. He delighted Miss Delessert, because he made her feel as if they were old friends ; and Marion began to wonder how such a lively and amusing talker could by any possibility have written poems over which she had dropped more foolish tears in secret than she would have cared to avow.

"I have spoken to you twice, Marion," said a laughing voice beside her. "What are you dreaming about? Did you ever see anything so lovely, Nora?—I thought those three were up to no good in the boudoir, and when I went in, there was that child actually trying on those exquisite diamonds in the glass. Fancy, Mr. Landon sending such a magnificent present! George insists on her wearing them to-night ; so here she comes like a queen, with her diamond star! I declare its shameful of Dick never to have

given me anything half so beautiful all the time we have been married !”

Lady Poictier’s pretty lips melted into a smile when Lilian came up and kissed her, and said—

“Dear Ness, I wish he had sent it to you, you would have looked so beautiful with it, and I feel quite frightened wearing them.”

Her lover, who stood by, looked at her sweet face with a proud smile, and she knelt down for Nora and Marion to admire the glittering gems he had placed on her brow.

Harley Grey felt his heart in his mouth to see her so radiant and beautiful, for he loved her too in his own quiet way, and felt a touch of solitariness, even when he rejoiced most at the happiness of the friend of his youth.

He started when he heard the countess speaking to him.

“Mr. Grey, will you kindly take Miss Delessert down to dinner ?”

A happy smile was on Lady Celadon’s face as she moved about among her guests ; to look at her graceful figure and brilliant complexion, it was difficult to believe that more than five-and-twenty years had flown since she herself had been a bride. Yet in quiet moments an attentive observer would have marked a shade of passing painful thought. More deeply than any there, because it came nearer home to her mother’s heart, she felt the coming parting of the morrow. Stifled tears never give so great a pain, nor cost so severe an effort, as when hidden with the smile of costly sympathy with gay and happy scenes. Happy indeed to others, though we cannot find at once the gain in the loss we feel,

"Or reach a hand through time to grasp
The far-off interest of tears."

"I wish Landon were here, with all my heart," said the Earl to Sir Hugh, as he passed down-stairs with Lady Delessert on his arm; "he is the absent one whom we must pledge to-night. My child looks well, considering, does she not?"

"I think we may be proud of them both," he said, "though I never felt so much inclined to run away with her in my life."

So the last evening had come at length. As Lilian took her seat at the table, and glanced at the clock opposite, she remembered a somewhat similar gathering on their first return to town after her engagement, and it seemed as if that moment came back, and the intervening time were reduced to a few days. That slow hand on the dial would have moved at very unequal speed if she had hastened or delayed its course at will.

"I wish it would not go so fast," she whispered to George, who sat beside her. When he felt the little hand cold as he took it in his own, he did not think her remark so common-place. But there was little time to indulge in more serious reflections then; every one around them was in the highest spirits, and the centre of all observation were the young lovers themselves, whose health and happiness were so stoutly pledged that night. Berthon retained, amid the general chaff and hilarity, so much thoughtful seriousness that the earl's brother, Lord Marmaduke Celadon, declared he was sacrificing himself, which the admiral's lady turned to good account against Lilian.

"I am afraid, Lady Delessert, that you married women raise a corps of borderers to keep the realms

of married life, and terrify novices from entering ; if so, I should say you held an important commission," said Eustace, who sat next to her.

"Oh, no ; I make the chains look as pretty and gilt as possible ; only, if Mr. Berthon is so solemn now, what hope is there for him when he is lord chancellor ? I tell him he reminds me of a man in one of my husband's ships, who never smiled ; on Monday morning he began to be solemn, and by the next Sunday his expression was perfectly diabolical !"

"I will promise to be merry as long as I have you to talk to," said Berthon across the table.

"No ; that is Lilian's place, not mine. Mr. Selwyn says he shall stop in the service, at the first tear."

"Then I should recommend you not to catch his eye," said Nora, "because I feel certain that if anyone cries to-morrow, it will be Lady Delessert !"

"Which is paying her a greater compliment than you think, Lady Nora," said a grave, deep voice from the end of the table. The speaker was Reginald Selwyn, who had been a contemporary of George Berthon at Oxford, and was now the curate of a London parish ; a man, to judge from without, who had seemed more fitted for a career at the bar or in the senate, than for the church, which profession he had however embraced. He enjoyed the friendship of Landon and of the Celadons, and had consented to assist at the nuptial rite on the morrow.

Lady Delessert, with all her witty worldliness, had a *penchant* for clergymen, partly because beneath her constant merriment there lay a nature deeply religious in its restless curiosity and dreamy imagination, partly because fate had thrown some very excellent and agreeable churchmen in her way. She was at once

struck with Selwyn's refined manner, and handsome, thoughtful face ; and proceeding on totally different grounds than in her treatment of other men, she set to work to gain the confidence of Berthon's clerical friend.

Meanwhile Harley sat and talked to Marion Delesert ; though she did most of the talking, delighted to find some one who seemed to appreciate her. She thought she had found in his poems the spirit which ruled her own life—which was a gentle melancholy, inclining to abstraction in her fancy's creed, and generalizing when she gave them utterance. She was quite earnest when she said in an undertone to him, amid the general conversation—

“Don't you think we are most happy when we follow our own meditations out of the world ? I should be miserable without my poets and flowers, and that dear church !”

“What church ?” said Grey, beginning to wonder what lurked within the depth of those deep-dreaming eyes.

“All Saints, Margaret Street,” she said, unconsciously.

He smiled to himself, and then, observing that her thin white hand still played with the maiden-hair beside her, and that she really seemed oblivious of passing things, he thought he would leave it to Colonel St. Leger, on her other hand, to pursue the subject further, if he wished.

Of all the beautiful women round the table, there were many to excite his admiration ; but as he looked from face to face, he could find no one but Lady Lilian whose lover he would have cared to have been that evening, and the bride elect engrossed most of

his thoughts. So young, so lovely; surely the man she loved would train her thoughts to unison with his, and work the treasures of her guileless mind as one that sought for precious pearls. He knew Berthon so well; his oft-expressed desire for some object upon which to lavish his deep affections, and his power of binding other hearts to his, when he chose to lay aside his proud reserve and to give play to the winning arts he knew so well how to use when he sought to fascinate and to please. Was there anything, then, which could possibly cast a shadow on the full tide of their happiness? Used as she was to compliments, that had passed into common-place, from others; even in that hour, after so long a period of most tender and intimate relations with her betrothed, Harley saw that her thoughts were all with his, as he laid his lance in rest in the wordy war between Lord Celadon and his distinguished guests, and the same flush of pleasure seemed to brush her tender cheek when he turned to appeal to herself, as had betrayed the secrets of her young heart when in the first days of happy love they had wandered and talked together in the summer flower-gardens at King's Lisle. Suddenly, and without a cause, there flashed upon the young poet the thought of what was probably passing at that moment in his own home. There is nothing like a momentary and unwilling comparison of the mind to hold the springs of mirth and sadness. He did not care to dwell upon a painful thought, so he drained the glittering glass beside him, and strove too to be merry with the rest. Yet, as he looked round on that brilliant scene, the sweet perfume of the exquisite flowers and luxuriant fruit that decked the table, the silent splendour of the graceful epergnes,

the massive silver, the light that danced on the many-coloured glass, and flashing gems of the fair and the gently-born who sat around him, whose silvery laughter and voices were as the music of many a brilliant dream, their forms so radiant and their rank and position so far removed from his own, the little room at home would come back upon him, with its dingy furniture and its silent, sad associations; and when he felt the force of that contrast, he could have wished himself away from the lights, the music, and the joy—anywhere to be alone, anywhere to escape the envy, or the pain, or the keenness of the thoughts that rankled in his mind at that moment. But moods of mind change at a touch; he caught Berthon's eye, and his friend, for whom this splendour and this feast was, whose own bride was the daughter of the house, of whose united happiness that eve was the consummation, raised his glass to him, and silently pledged him to drink to her and him. He woke as from a trance, and cursed the weak human nature that came in to make the voice of selfishness heard in such an hour as this, and that so effectually, that none seemed lighter-hearted, none gayer, none more brilliant in rallying his fair friends and parrying Lady Delessert's and Lady Nora's lively repartees for the remainder of that evening, than Harley Grey.

Marion was satisfied that her own charm had worked, and she told Lilian afterwards that Mr. Grey was the most engaging man she had met.

Lady Lilian hid a bright smile in her bouquet; perhaps she had observed more closely, and knew more than the fair girl and sweet friend who caressed her hand, and whose innocent gratification she would not for worlds have destroyed by a word.

George Berthon had little thought that night for any one but his betrothed. He felt anxious lest overwrought feelings should cause her delicate sensitive nature to break down. Now that the eve had come when all his past life seemed gathered up as it were into a scroll, and the day, whose rosy dawn he had watched for through years of ever-deepening love, was at hand, he found himself, without any effort on his part, calm and collected : indeed, he did not even then quite realize that the morrow was in truth his marriage-day. But it was otherwise with Lilian. When away from her side, exchanging brief conversations with those who desired most to see him and speak with him that night, he was aware of the occasional 'timid, wistful gaze with which she followed him, and he had never felt before as he felt then the full demand of those obligations, or the extent of the power of that tie which bound him thenceforth to her who had laid down the secure happiness and the bright crown of her maidenhood in exchange for the promises of a life to them both alike untried and unknown, whose golden hopes, so far as they affected her and engrossed her thoughts, were necessarily centred in himself. But love is confident, and confidence is calm ; and when she saw his brow quiet, and the bright smile upon his lips, as he received the congratulations of many friends for himself and her, and felt that he was with her in all, she let his voice charm her thoughts to rest ; and Lilian, too, was happy.

Maurice Fienne felt that he was but of secondary importance there that evening, and wished it over. Yet he studied closely the manners and bearing of the man who was most concerned, and was astounded in his own mind to observe with what perfect self-

possession Berthon carried off what to most men is a trying occasion. His sister Catherine, a dark, handsome girl, with a tall, graceful figure, and magnificent eyes and hair, as black as the jet necklace and cross that fell over her white neck, came up as he leant against the doorway, alone, quietly observing the company, and complained to him that he had not done Berthon justice in his description of him to her.

"You quite deceived me, Maurice," she said. "I think he is a most distinguished-looking man, and delightful to talk to."

"You may find him so, Catherine," he replied ; "I told you he was a handsome fellow, but I consider still that there is a look of very deep design beneath that quiet smile of his. But I would not wrong him for worlds ; his courtesy is crushing and as polished as—Mephistopheles!" he added, with a laugh that caused Miss Fienne's dark eyes to scrutinize with an inquiring glance her brother's own clear-cut features.

"You seem amused, Fienne ; may I not share the joke, particularly as your fair sister promised me at dinner some amusement this evening which she has forgotten ?"

The speaker was Vernon Brereton, Esq., Q.C., a slight acquaintance of Fienne's, a great admirer of his sister, and who was very willing to improve the former.

"I promised you you should see my brother paying a lady compliments, Mr. Brereton," replied Miss Fienne, showing her brilliant teeth, "which you did not seem to believe him capable of, but Lady Nora appears too busy for anything this evening."

Fienne turned sharply on his sister, but he said

nothing, and left them *tête-à-tête* to join the countess, who was at that moment alone.

Lord Lisle sat with his sister and Berthon, and the trio were silent. Lilian held Landon's letter in her hand ; whether she was thinking of his absence, and his deep affection for Berthon, or whether her thoughts were in the ravishing and tender music that Nora's fair hands were charming from the piano, where she sat in the farther room, her eyes filled with tears, and she dreaded lest anyone should observe it. Then Lady Celadon came and joined them on the sofa, and when Miss Fienne had sang an Italian song with her rich contralto voice, the countess said to Lilian—

“Now, darling, you must give us one song to-night.”

“Mamma, dear, I cannot.”

But both Eustace and George seconded the entreaty, and the earl himself gave her his arm to lead her to her accustomed seat. It was the last time that she should sing to them, and it needed little of pathos or regret to fill the heart at such a moment with that indefinable sadness which seems to be born of joy. Berthon did not follow her ; but he remained by her mother, holding the countess's hand in his own, and having his eyes fixed with tender interest on the fair face of his beloved, as she struck a few chords, and sang the song that had first passed her fluttering lips on the evening after his first passionate kiss had sealed them to his own for ever.

Nora fairly cried, but not till she had fled to the conservatory, where no one could see her ; and Violet felt very much inclined to, as with one arm round Lilian's waist, she knelt beside her at the piano. Nora had been, for her, silent and absent all the even-

ing ; she began to feel the shadow of the days to come, and the deep springs of a sister's love were troubled with emotions she felt the more keenly in that she had concealed them so carefully with busy cheerfulness and merry laughter so long.

The earl himself was moved ; he was grave and silent ; perhaps he would not have trusted himself to speak, but when the countess rose, and passed her arm in his, and looked earnestly into his face, he bent down and imprinted a tender kiss upon his wife's brow. And the force of Lilian's own feelings carried her away in the spirit she had evoked, and sustained her through an effort which tried her nerves to the utmost. When the last plaintive note of her exquisite voice died away, she did not move, but hid her face in her hands. Gently did someone draw them away, and Berthon's deep "thank you, Lilian," broke the spell of a most painful silence. She allowed herself to be led back to where her father and mother were standing, and it was a grateful relief when Fienne and his sister came up to bid good-night.

Lord Celadon took Fienne aside, and said—

"There is no reason for you to hurry away, Maurice ; I have asked George and St. Leger to stay and have a cigar downstairs : we break up after to-morrow ; come, your friend Corrence is not here," he added laughingly.

Fienne hesitated a few moments and then replied—

"Well, I will ; I will see Catherine off and then return."

Lord Eustace and Grey stood on the staircase ; as Sir Hugh passed them they invited him to join them in the smoking-room.

"Not if you were to pay me," said the admiral

stoutly, who abhorred the weed ; " what are you going to talk about ? much better go to bed and dream of all these pretty girls ; you will look like ghosts to-morrow, all of you. Where is that wife of mine ? " he continued, turning about, " there she is smothering that child Lilian with kisses, and there's Marion to come after ; we shan't get home to-night. Why, I'd have given her twenty kisses in half this time : what an exquisite creature she is, Eustace, the image of her dear mother ; ah ! you fellows should have seen *her* at eighteen. Berthon is a devilish lucky man, I know ; but he is the only fellow I know worth her, and I have summed him up very fairly ; those two will make a noise in the world before they have done, you will see ! Come along," and the admiral captured his daughter, and led her off to the carriage.

Lady Lilian detained her lover one moment behind, and whispered anxiously in his ear.

" Very well, my darling, I will remember," he said fondly, " and now we must go : we shall meet, Lilian, at the altar."

" To-morrow," she faltered, hiding her face on his breast. She seemed to linger like a tired bird : he gently released her, and with one long kiss, they parted.

The party downstairs did not break up for an hour later. Lord Celadon had much to say to Berthon ; he read Landon's letter with mingled gratification and regret.

" My oldest, and my best friend," he said, " twenty guests could not fill his place at the table, nor turn my thoughts from him. There is not his equal in the world, George,"

" Ilceston Towers," observed Colonel St. Leger, " is

said to be the loveliest spot in the south-west of England ; what time do you get there to-morrow evening, Berthon ?”

“ We must quit the festivities early, I expect ; the express will get down in five hours, I hope ; a carriage will meet us at the village of Ilceston.”

Fienne did not join much in the conversation, though all his thoughts were on the events of the morrow. A discussion on Greville Landon always made him moody and silent ; had he uttered his own thoughts he might have somewhat jarred the general harmony ; so Catherine’s dark brother smoked his cigar in attentive silence.

Harley and Selwyn made friends ; but it was impossible to talk of anything but the events of the morrow, and despite all that had happened that evening, and all that was said as the men sat together then, Harley felt heavy at heart. He was not thinking so much of the wedding-morning as of the day after.

Before they separated, Berthon found an opportunity of speaking to Fienne alone.

“ Lilian has already asked your sister,” he said, “ not to let the honour she is to do us to-morrow by being her bridesmaid be the end of their acquaintance ; may I hope that the nearness of ‘ Fienne House ’ may induce you sometimes to visit St. Cecily’s ?”

“ It is very good of you to say so,” replied Fienne, surprised. “ I am not often there for long, but when I am, I shall not forget your kind invitation. You will allow me to wish you every happiness,” he added, shaking hands. Berthon thanked him, and they rose to go.

The earl linked his arm in his as they went to the door.

"It is come at last," he said with a cheerful smile, "you must do us all honour to-morrow, George. You have won some hearts here, my boy, and you must remember a man must leave a good impression on his wedding-day. Everything looks well; make our child as happy as she promises herself, and we will forgive you taking her away. God bless you, George!"

Lord Celadon returned into the house, and Berthon took Grey's arm homewards.

"There seems no night," he said, as they strolled along, "it is to me as if it were already morning, and the world was waiting for the dawn."

When they reached his rooms, he persuaded Grey, who slept there that night, to leave him. Harley retired, and Berthon found himself alone. He placed the lamp where he could view the picture of his mother. Was it, indeed, possible, that that fair tender girl, who seemed herself a child, but for the strange expression of care in the sweet eyes that looked upon him, could be his mother? He had never seen her, never heard her voice. Gertrude Landon was but twenty when she died. So he had been told; how could he know? He had never seen her grave.

For a long hour George Berthon remained there. His past life lay behind like a map; he could place his finger on far-off events, and speak of them as of yesterday; years of toil, years of waiting, years of hope and desire, so long in the coming, were summed up into an hour. He had come so far: what was in the future? And the form of his beloved rose like a vision of the night. Was he, indeed, worthy of that lovely life, of that deathless love? A little while and

the dreams of youth would be faded. What would be then achieved of all those lofty hopes? George Berthon sank upon his knees, and prayed in the night for strength to grapple with the destiny of the coming years.



CHAPTER XI.

*"O true and tried, so well and long,
Demand not thou a marriage lay,
In that it is thy marriage day
Is music more than any song."*

TENNYSON.

THE day of days was come! Of what slight importance to the world at large, but of what infinite consequence to the individual! We cannot make that world partakers of our joy, but it seems to minister to it. Can there be any guilt or misery among men, under the light of that glorious sun, within the sound of those joyous bells? Everything is instinct with life, and whatever the path of the past may have been, the road into the future seems to mount on waves of light to the golden stars, and to be strewn with fadeless flowers. The morning is revelling in his strength like a giant refreshed; the air is alive with the sound of merry voices; the laughter of the rosy lips, the sparkle of happy eyes, is around us; the music of joy lulls every thought to rest but those that beat responsive to its strains. Can the day ever fade, or the twilight come, or those voices be silent again, for ever!

Has there ever broke a bridal morn on which some such thoughts have not filled up the mind of happy

maid or blissful lover, like a golden goblet flowing to the brim with delicious wine? Is there a single one who has ever lived that has passed those temple-gates who would not give a different answer?

When Harley Grey entered the breakfast-room, he found his friend quietly reading.

"How can you be reading the *Times*?" he said. "You ought to be studying the marriage-service, if anything."

"Everything in order," he replied, coolly. "If I don't look at the paper now, I shan't have a chance till—I don't know when. Here's a paragraph contradicting old Fienne's rumoured retirement from parliament; the old boy means to die in harness evidently."

"When you have finished, we will have breakfast, and settle our business," said Grey, a little provoked.

"Very well," returned Berthon, throwing away the journal, with an air that perhaps betrayed his inward feelings were not quite in accordance with the manner he assumed. "Come, then, we will set about it at once. The things I wanted you to attend to, old boy, I have made a memorandum of; I have been up for hours, arranging matters with more anxiety than you gave me credit for. Look."

Harley glanced round, and saw three or four letters on the mantelpiece, which had been written that morning; his portmanteau closed, ready for travelling, and even his overcoat, with cigar-case, pocket-book, Hargreave's flask, &c., lying ready for departure.

"You see I am prepared for the worst; and have sent that fellow Hargreaves, quite put out because I presumed to attend to them without him, to pay one or two bills for me. There is only one important

thing, Harley, which I wish to speak to you about. I have seen Harris, and told him that my phaeton and riding horse are under your orders till my return to town. I shall be very much hurt, my dear fellow, if you raise any objections. I assure you I shall only be too pleased if you will use them as your own. When shall you consider yourself intimate enough to throw away your foolish pride, Harley?"

Grey was silent a few moments; then he pressed his friend's hand, and said, with a biting lip.

"Very well, George, very well. Do as you like. I will use them. It is too kind of you, old fellow; but—"

"Nothing more!" said Berthon, hastily, rising and going to the window. "Here is Eustace, in his brougham. Consider all settled, and do me this favour for once."

Lord Lisle entered the room, his face bright with smiles. As he took Berthon's hand, he retained it in his own, and for a moment their eyes met in silent greeting.

"A thousand good wishes to you, George," said Eustace, first breaking the silence. "At last, we are brothers!"

"Not yet!" returned Berthon, laughing. "Do not rob me of my last hours of single existence. How have you left them all?"

"I have seen no one but my father. The lower regions were in the hands of the enemy, garrisoned by an army from Gunter's; and upstairs, silence. Aphrodite is not yet risen from the foam. I wished to spend an hour with you. Your friend, Grey, will, I dare say, forgive my intrusion. I see, you have some chairs left, lucky man. Let us sit in the window."

"I had very much wished," said Berthon, when they were seated, "that Lilian and I should leave St. George's by the vestry door after service ; there was a violent opposition to my proposal on the part of the ladies. Do you bring me any message about it ?"

"I am afraid you must give in, and consent to the march past, or you will make enemies for ever with those who consider a bride and her bridesmaids fair game for the British stare."

Berthon sighed, and let the subject drop. The hour slipped quietly away. Hargreaves came in, and received his last instructions. His quiet grey eyes sparkled with pleasure as they fell on the flask, and his usually stolid features relaxed into a grin of unmistakable satisfaction when he coolly unscrewed the top and evidenced for himself that his young master had put it to its intended use.

As the half-hour struck from St. James', Lord Lisle and Berthon, with Harley, entered the carriage and drove away.

The *Morning Post* had taken care to keep its readers informed of the day of the celebration of Lady Lilian Celadon's marriage ; and the "Kettledrum" had beaten its first tattoo on the names of the fair bridesmaids and their probable costume, so that there was already a crowd at the old church in Hanover Square, the sacredness of whose shrine might be supposed to be in proportion to its gloom.

George Berthon sat with a beating heart in the vestry, with his friends. Who are those muscular Christians who pass that ordeal with unshaken nerves ? There is something consoling even in the inevitable as contrasted with suspense : and the crowned victim contrived to keep up a cheerful conversation with

the assistant executioner, for Selwyn had joined them, and his two associates.

"Come, George," said Eustace, returning from a reconnoitre, "they will be here in five minutes, and there are dozens] of friends in the aisle who want to speak to you."

Berthon rose, and entered the church. In spite of the season of the year, the building was crowded, and he felt as he advanced to the altar the delightful consciousness that hundreds of eyes were riveted upon him. There is nothing that fancy is more apt to exaggerate than the awfulness of facing a crowd. A very little experience will convince most men that the reality is a far less painful thing than solitary rumination beforehand on its terrors. Berthon's composure returned the moment he found himself face to face with the event of his life. If swift tumultuous thoughts swept through his mind, they proceeded from other causes. Where was Lilian, and what were her feelings? He longed to be at her side. He had too often ruled the storm of debate among his equals in years, and faced the dread silence and awe of a court which hung upon his lips, to care for the curious gaze of a congregation of idlers. Perhaps he would have been quite reassured if the testimony of the fair occupants of the galleries to his handsome face and unexceptionable figure and dress had reached his ears.

Many friendly hands and welcome smiles greeted him as he mingled with the brilliant assembly which had come at the earl and countess' bidding to do honour to their daughter's bridals. Down the long aisle he saw the bright cluster of beautiful girls who awaited their queen. Suddenly there was a movement at the door, a murmur of voices, and as the

organ rolled out its magnificent symphony, Lady Lilian, robed in white, appeared leaning upon the arm of her father, and followed by her own sisters, only less lovely than herself, Marion Delessert pale and sweet, Fienne's stately sister, and the two other fair girls whom Lilian had besought to attend her to the passing of the river. Then came the countess with Eustace, and the rest of the company. Berthon stood at the altar-rails, and awaited her coming. In that moment were summed up the hopes and desires of many human years. He could not see her face till she came close, but beneath the flowing folds of her bridal veil he thought her soft eyes were downcast, and her young cheeks pale. The morning sun struck through the sacred gloom, and in its rays the brilliant dresses and jewels of the circle around him seemed to flash like the colours of a dream.

Her father grasped his hand as he released hers, and fell back to his place, leaving them alone. Lilian raised her eyes to his face ; its look of proud calm gave her confidence ; a sweet smile parted her trembling lips, and she took her place at his side. The organ ceased, and a great silence fell around as were uttered the opening words of the solemn service of the Church, so eloquent in their majestic simplicity.

Simple question, simple answer ; the forging of the last link of the golden chain that should last through all eternity, Wilt thou ?— I will. The deep steady tones of his voice roused Lilian from a trance ; then came the same question, and the same reply, which as it left her faltering lips seemed to strike a note through all the worlds, of joy. The ring was on ; the solemn vows given, and life's fevered pulses beat again, when the clear calm voice of the clergyman resumed. Is

the dream of what might be ever realized in the coming of what *is*? Suffice it that it was surpassed that day. Thenceforth the stream that had wandered in lonely broodings through the fields of morning was a deep rushing river; thenceforth could life have no solitude, nor the heart's desire an earthly void. A great calm filled Berthon's mind when he found all was over. Joyous greetings and congratulations were on every side, as they passed through the crowd to the vestry; then followed the signing of the names,

“ Mute symbols of a joyful morn.”

Lady Celadon's tender kisses, and the earl's cheery tones of satisfaction. Lilian raised her veil, and Berthon looked at his wife; her face was all smiles now, and true to Landon's words, a brighter light shone in her sweet eyes than flashed from the jewelled star upon her forehead. The hurried whisperings over, and the bridesmaids' rights satisfied, they passed into the church again, and with a proud brow and firm step Berthon led his lovely bride down the aisle. Even this was less trouble than he had supposed, for there was no time for thought. So many kind faces, so many smiling welcomes, and friendly hands, and the deep consciousness of the reality of his happiness, crowded into the space of those few brief moments, as forbade reflection. The waves of triumphant music filled the air, and in the twilight of the sacred aisles voices of angels seemed to answer to the rolling thunder of Mendelssohn's exquisite strains. There are times when music seems a ladder between earth and heaven. Whence the rapturous elation of the beating heart, and the unbidden moisture of the yearning eyes? But they had reached the door, and all was

over. The bright sunlight of the outside day, and the gazing of the eager crowd, compel one to a more forcible realization of the occasion. Berthon could not forbear a smile at the involuntary admiration of the bystanders for Lilian ; perhaps their impromptu compliments sank deeper into his heart than the honeyed words of many more refined lips which he heard around him all that memorable day.

Lilian sank back in the carriage with a feeling of grateful relief ; he sprang in, and they drove rapidly away. When they had once passed the line of waiting carriages and the curious crowd of sight-seers, Berthon spoke to her the first words she had heard from his own lips that day to herself ; a deep blush came over her fair face as he took her hand in his, and asked her whether she was happy. Perhaps he knew there was no need of an answer, nor wanted any other than the smile of trustful joy that lighted up her features. He took the little hand that wore the golden ring, and drawing from his pocket a beautiful diamond placed it on her finger, to keep it, as he said laughing, safe and holy. Before she could answer, they stopped at the door of her father's mansion.

As far as the outside show is concerned, one fashionable wedding is a type of all. But what of the maiden heart that flutters beneath the lace and jewels ? What of the feelings of him who has that hour bound himself by irrevocable vows to honour and love for life ?

Lord Celadon's household thronged the hall to see them arrive. Berthon valued the congratulations of the servants, some of whom had known Lilian all her life, for its own sake ; folk are apt to under-value the good opinion of these good people, not knowing that very marked personal qualities are necessary to gain

it. Berthon had had neither rank nor fortune to favour him in the eyes of others ; it was therefore flattering to him that his presence and intercourse with so many comparative strangers had worked so strong a prepossession towards himself.

As he moved among the Earl's distinguished guests that morning, he was gratified at the reception he met with. One elderly dowager in satin was particularly gracious, as it was her first introduction to him, and the aristocratic old dame had expatiated to her grand-daughters previously on her astonishment that the earl and countess could permit such a match between Lady Lilian and a man who was nobody at all. But as she followed him with her eye-glass in the throng, she confessed that he was more distinguished-looking than the young marquis whose suit to her own grand-daughter she so assiduously favoured, and that his courtesy carried her back to the days when good-breeding was the only criterion of a gentleman.

Happy it was for George Berthon that the tie between himself and her who was the admiration of every eye, and the theme of every lip, was neither relationship, nor equal rank, nor princely fortune, but only that which is worth them all, and despises them all—love, priceless and divine.

The time sped ; and they sat down to the wedding-feast. The sun which looked in on the silent rooms upstairs, and the brilliant masses of autumn flowers in the balconies, played upon the white and gold of the bridal cake, and lit with a brighter glow the fair and happy faces round. During the progress of the breakfast—or dinner, by that lighter name—and when Berthon could gain a respite from his share in the hubbub of merry voices, he had time to look

round the table for his own friends. Harley Grey was assigned to Miss Delessert, and that young lady who must have felt, however humbly, the additional force that clouds of white tarlatan and pink roses lent to unmistakable charms, seemed very satisfied with her friend ; he looked quite handsome to-day, and the generous champagne had imparted a glow to his usually pale cheeks. Roused from his deep reveries, Harley could be brilliant, and Berthon smiled when he afterwards overheard Miss Delessert press her mother to invite him to their house. Sir Hugh, who sat on one hand of the countess, even forgot the bridesmaids, of whom he took especial care, in his admiration for his fair and amiable hostess, who did the honours that day with a grace that the fastidious Fienne pronounced perfect. Selwyn ran in danger of the latter in his attentions to Lady Nora, who did not guess in her laughing raillery of all her devotees that the young clergyman would have liked to change places for a while with Harley Grey.

Then came the speeches, which were happily few and brief, by desire, for the time was short. The dean, whose wit was as celebrated as his slightly unorthodox theology, rose to give the bride and bridegroom's health. He dwelt upon the beauty and worth of the bride, and the brilliant reputation of her lover, in words whose felicitous eloquence was not a little embarrassing to him who had to reply. When George Berthon rose the laughter was silenced, and he found he had harder work than a brief on a railway committee. He acknowledged gracefully the dean's compliments, which were, he said, as unworthy to himself as they were indeed worthy of her whom he had the unspeakable happiness that day of calling his

wife. He thought, if wit were required, they would credit him that his feelings were too deep for lighter words, and those who were to follow had but to take inspiration from the glancing eyes of the fair women who had done him such abundant honour. He spoke of the earl, and his appreciation of their union in heart and name, and even Lady Celadon, used as she was to compliment both true and false, felt her face burn at the touching words in which he paid her a tribute to her womanhood that those present never forgot. The future was a secret, but if a life's earnest effort could make him worthy of his bride, that future would be as radiant with promise as it was with happiness. The earl, who spoke for himself and his wife, declared to all that rank and beauty that he felt himself honoured that day in gaining such a son ; and from him, too, came easier the explanation, which lay in his warm tribute to what true manhood meant, and that all true success in life was owing thereto. His farewell words to Lilian drew involuntary tears from some eyes, but the shade passed away when Sir Hugh Delessert declared his ambition to be a bridesmaid, and gave their healths in words whose exuberant fun, spiced with the latent wickedness which over fifty years' harness had failed to kill, Lord Lisle found it very difficult to rival. Lilian felt proudest that day when Berthon was speaking ; but mingled emotions of supreme joy and unwilling sadness caused her cheeks alternately to flush and pale. She was glad, when the laughter and gaiety was at its height, to rise unnoticed and leave the room with her mother. There was but little more.

Berthon left his group of friends at a summons that Lady Celadon wished to see him. As he left the

room he found that the carriage was at the door by which they were to leave. A crowd was without, attracted equally by pardonable curiosity and Strauss' inimitable valse-music. The Countess was in her boudoir, when he entered, alone. She took his hand, and pressed her lips to his forehead; he observed that she could scarcely speak for tears.

"I wished to tell you—once more, dear George," she faltered, "how much we all love and trust you; but,—my child, it is very hard to part with *her*; but—I know she will be happy, and it is all for the best. You will love and cherish her, I know. Do not forget us altogether in your happiness!" and she fell upon his neck, weeping.

The earl, entering, roused her, and Berthon felt himself almost unmanned, till he heard Lord Celadon's cheery tones. The countess dashed away her tears, and they went into the drawing-room to bid goodbye. Lady Lilian had already passed through the ordeal of farewells with those she loved best, in the privacy of her own room. She appeared now all smiles for those for whom she felt them due. Berthon was prouder of her in her pretty travelling dress than even in the stately bridal robes she had laid aside for ever. Then were hands wrung, and blessings whispered, and many last words that never were the last, and hopes of glad meetings again at an early date.

The warning hour struck, and, taking his lovely bride upon his arm, Berthon passed down to the thronged hall. Eustace Grey and another friend had gone off in their brougham already, to be at the station.

Hargreaves hurried his master away, declaring no earthly power could make them catch their train, but not before he had stolen a parting kiss from the

housemaid, who had particularly fascinated him this morning. Lilian kissed her gloved hand to the brilliant party in the balcony, and Berthon, receiving the earl's last injunction, which had reference to Landon, wrung that kind hand, and sprang in after her.

The bystanders raised a spontaneous cheer, and amid a shower of satin shoes whose long acquaintance with waxed floors at some distant date had destroyed their texture, from the pretty group above, George and Lady Lilian Berthon rolled away.

As they swept round the further corner of the square, he could see the sun flash on the white faces in the balcony, the wave of a handkerchief from the carriage-window was Lilian's last adieu. She leant back, and they were silent. A sigh of inexpressible relief escaped her lips, not unmingled with the feeling of a new fear, sweet and indefinable. The hour was yet early, but she was tired with the excitement of the morning, and seemed to dread the curious gaze of the passers-by, whose attention was attracted by the wedding favours of the servants. Berthon only uttered a remark now and then. It was not a time to care for conversation, and they were passing swiftly through scenes which were eloquent to him of that part of his life which was a closed book for ever. She felt more fearful of him now, when he was grave and thoughtful; but the pressure of the hand in which he held her own was a talisman to keep her assured.

"I am so glad it is all over!" she whispered, watching the changing expression of his face, and wondering what he was thinking about.

"So am I, darling," he said, looking laughingly into her grave trustful eyes; "it all seems such a little

thing now ; we wake up from our confused dream, and fancy it all acted in one short hour ago."

"I don't want to wake, George!" she replied, with a happy sigh ; he smiled, but did not speak, and so they drove up to the station. Eustace and Grey and Colonel St. Leger were there to see them off.

"You have no time to lose," exclaimed her brother, as they alighted ; "the first bell has gone ; your carriage is reserved at the upper end ; your luggage has gone in, including Harriet and the dressing-case."

"I will thank you, St. Leger," Berthon said, "to escort Lady Lilian to the train ; I will follow immediately."

They passed through the bustling crowd, and he took Eustace's arm, and almost forgot the place and the occasion in the earnestness of those last words.

"You will and must go back, and enjoy the dance," he urged, as he held Harley's hand, "Eustace will compel you." Harley looked doubtful.

"For Miss Delessert's sake," added Lord Lisle. "Ah! Grey, you will find yourself some day in the same predicament as this fellow does now ; when you recover your senses, George, let us know where and how you are ; your temporary insanity draws to an end. Good luck to you both, old boy!"

Colonel St. Leger, having completed Lady Lilian's safe deposit, and the arrangements for her comfort in the carriage, received her precious thanks with his courtliest air ; he was her old friend ; and perhaps there was a little faltering of the sabre-scarred lip beneath that heavy iron-grey moustache as he felt the full force of the changes that rolled their tide between that moment and the day when he had danced her on his knee, and given George Berthon's sweet

bride bon-bons in exchange for kisses. A shrill whistle roused the little party with a start, and with many a last message, and many a generous wish, they parted. The trio of friends were left upon the platform, and in a few minutes the express to the south-west was speeding on its way.

Five hours came and went, and the sun's last rays had faded from England's fairest fields, when the long low wash of the tide on a near shore, and the slackening speed of the lazy little train which had brought them on a branch line for the last twenty miles, made known to those unheeding travellers that their railway journey was at an end.

It was night, with faint streaks of day yet lingering round the west. The journey was not new to Berthon, but Lilian felt in a strange land. There were few passengers and few people about, but there was a little gathering of curious faces round the door of the closed carriage that stood in the station, to see the strangers who, by report, were said to be due at Ilceston that evening. As the light breeze, freshening every minute, blew cool from the sea, George wrapt Lilian carefully in a shawl and she was thankful, when they started on their drive, to close her eyes and rest her weary little head on his shoulder, in the corner of the somewhat old-fashioned equipage which was to convey them to Greville Landon's country home.

They left the shore after a while, and the ground rose rapidly; on leaving the village, the road skirted the park for some distance, and then by a winding path, cut in the steep slant of the sandstone quarries and larch woods, brought them to the high table-land on which Ilceston Towers stood; an old majestic pile of buildings, a beacon to the surrounding wild and

beautiful country for many miles. The autumn moon cast a silvery light over the smooth grass lands, shaded with large trees, which spread on all sides into distant gloom, and threw into clear relief the old grey stone towers and buttresses of the house, when the carriage woke the echoes of the gravel drive. Lilian looked out, and thought they drew near to an enchanted castle rather than an English gentleman's country seat, the place and all about it looked so weird and beautiful. The wide hall-door stood open, and a flood of light from within streamed on the pillars of the porch and out into the dim mist of the lawn. The old housekeeper and her husband, Landon's steward, with the servants who lived there, were waiting to receive their guests. Mr. Landon had evidently taken care that nothing should be wanting to make their reception worthy of his house and his visitors.

At any other time than that when his bride was all the world to him, George Berthon would have felt the painful effect of the solitude of that place without its own master to shed the spell of his presence about it, and even then, for a moment, till he was met by Lilian's bright eyes fixed inquiringly, and with an amused smile on his face, he stood in the hall, and seemed to be looking wistfully for him without whose voice of welcome he had never trod that threshold before.

"I want you to put on your shawl and come down the garden," he said to Lilian later, "if you are not too exhausted with your journey: it is a lovely warm night, and the moonlight is bright as day."

"I suppose I must obey you now?" she said, laughing. "I should like it immensely."

In a few seconds Lilian, enveloped in her cloak, and leaning on her husband's arm, too happy almost to reply to a voice in her ear whose tones had never sounded so loving and tender before, accompanied him across the lawn and down the sloping sward among the flower-beds to the valley that ran seawards from the house.

"What do you think of the place, Lilian, and our rooms?"

"O, it is lovely! I long to see it by sunlight; that dear Mrs. Treherne showed me the part of the house we are to live in; nearly all the rooms look this way, to the sea, and Mr. Landon, she says, wrote from Italy about all the arrangements. Everything looks perfect!"

"So luxurious that my little one will not care to leave it, eh?"

"Don't let us talk of that, darling; I forbid you to think of a single day ahead," she answered, clinging closer to his arm.

"You need not be afraid, child," he said, as her timid steps hung back on the steep slope they were descending between the trees; "lean on me; I know every step of the way, for—but wait a minute, and I will tell you. Now then," he added, as they reached level ground again, "look through the trees; we are quite safe now: what do you think of that?"

An exclamation of wonder and delight burst from Lilian's lips. They had reached nearly the bottom of the valley, down which a tiny stream leapt noisily over the rocks and loose boulders, till it welled out over the silver sands; right over against them rose the other side, a dark mass of trees, and far away, in a wide circle at their feet, rolled the great wide moon-

lit sea. The tide was on the turn, and over the lines of low-lying rocks the swell broke with a plaintive roar, the white foam glittering like diamonds beneath the still stars. Nearly to their feet came the shining sands, and over its level expanse in ever-widening circles, the shallow after-flow of the distant breakers roamed, singing its ceaseless song with its thousand tiny ripples.

"How exquisitely beautiful, George!" said Lilian, leaning her tired head upon his shoulder; "and you were here so many years ago, and is it the same to-night as it was then?"

"That is what I was going to tell you; I brought you here to show you the very spot I used often to come to, to listen to God's great sea, and wonder what wide worlds were out beyond those silver mists; and, Lilian, here I came to try and throw away from me into that sea the love for you that was growing day by day into my life."

"Throw it away, George! but why—?"

"Because I did not dare to hope, darling, that you and I should ever stand here together; but it was no use, Lilian, for you seemed to be here more than anywhere else, and it broke my heart to go away even from the thoughts of you that lived here."

"O, George! and did you really love me better than all the world—you who had so many great things to live for?"

"Better than all that life could give me besides, Lilian!"

"O, I knew it—I knew it; and I often cried the whole night long!" she said, hiding her face upon his breast. He gently stole his arm round her form, and they were folded in a silent embrace, of too great

happiness for mortal words. Then, when she raised her face again, he kissed her soft cheeks, and they were wet with happy tears.

"Look," she murmured, nestling there in the full content of an awful joy, "look at those lovely stars ! O, George, can it be that those same stars look down on London to-night ?—it makes me so unhappy."

"Unhappy, darling—why ?"

"Because they look so sad when we are sad, and the world is so full of sorrow. Why are not all people happy ? O, George, why does God not make the whole world as happy as we are ?"

"To-day and to-morrow, and year after year, Lilian, will pass away, however full its joy may be ; and to every one the world is always changing, and to every one comes his sorrow and his joy alike. Should we wonder where those shining pathways wandered into heaven,—should we think so much of those who loved as we love and are parted for ever, Lilian, on earth,—should we, do you think, care to follow, if life were all one dream of bliss ?"

"No, George, you are right ; but it is sad to think of sorrow, and the future ; must you go back to the big world again ?"

"It is the lot of man, Lilian, darling, and we cannot, if we would, escape the work which God has given us to do. Listen to the sea. The wind that fans our cheeks now, blowing from the warm and gentle south, will some day become a mighty gale, and that low music of the wash of the waters on the shore must change to awful thunder. Storm and sunshine ever interchange, and must go on for ever ; so is our life, and its greatest joys spring from sorrows. O, Lilian, my own sweet wife, love is the only

thing that lasts through all ; though life passes away, let us keep its one treasure !”

“ But you said, darling,” she replied in low, murmured accents, “ that life must pass away, and if love is to last, where should we find it again ?”

“ Where the life that passes away is renewed for evermore, Lilian, and love itself becomes imperishable, as the stars for ever and ever—in the bosom of God !”



CHAPTER XII.

*“ The good or ill hope of a good or ill life
Is the good or ill choice of a good or ill wife.”*

OLD PROVERB.

“ PUT another log on the fire, Letty, and make a blaze,” said old Jem, the fisherman, to his daughter-in-law, who sat opposite to him in the chimney-corner. Letty stayed her knitting, and taking up a dry block of beech-wood from the heap against the wall, threw it on the smouldering fire, which sent a rush of sparks scampering up the flue ; then she resumed her needles, and with her pretty little foot began to gently rock the wooden cradle at her side, in which a rosy boy slept unconscious.

Jem was seventy, and his hair was grisly with years, but it grew abundantly still ; he disdained sleep in the evening, and his book lay beside him with his silver spectacles ; but he had laid it down early that night, and had been quietly smoking in silence his very long clay pipe for some time.

The table in the middle of their humble room was strewn with papers and writing materials, and the contents of a small box of compasses were lying about. These belonged to Jem the younger, but he too had left his employment, and drawn a wooden chair to the fire, where he sat with his brown hands on his knees, gazing intently into the embers.

"I suppose, Jem, he's arrived," said the old man, breaking the silence.

"Who, father?" asked Letty, raising her dark hazel eyes to his face.

"Young Mr. Berthon—Landon he ought to be called—Master George that was, who's expected to-day at the big house with his bride. Ah, he shouldn't have gone and married an earl's daughter," and Jem shook his grey head very solemnly.

"Yes, he's here," said the son, "I heard it as I came up the cliff. He'll be over here to-morrow, I guess."

"Will he bring his beautiful lady with him, I wonder?"

"Very likely, Letty."

"Not she," said the old man testily, "them grand ladies is not the sort down here; doan't I remember them all up at the house, ever so many years ago, long afore you was born, Letty. Sure, I never set eyes on Master George's gal, but she's a Londoner, Letty, and a great earl's daughter, and I know what that means."

"D'ye think, father, he was the man to wed any of them, because I don't."

"There's no knowing, Jem; for, to be sure, he used to rail as a lad against the women; but there ain't many angels where she came from, and Lord Celadon's a mighty great man up there; ask Mr. Landon what he thinks of them fine women—ah! but no matter;

it's all over for him." The fisherman sighed ; then he blew a long whiff of tobacco smoke, and went on in a monotonous undertone, to which, however, both Letty and her husband listened attentively. " I should be sorry to see that fine spirit broken up ; marriage is a reef, Jem, on which I've known many a fine boat go to pieces ; it ain't all wives that are like you, Letty," he continued, without observing that Jem had caused the knitting to stop again by detaining in his own one of the busy hands, or that Letty's cheek showed a deeper bloom. " Master George deserves a good wife, for a nobler lad never walked—a regular Landon, barring his—ha ! s'pose he was—his grandfather. But you see, Jem, he was handsome, and young fellows are easily flattered by women, and right safe to make a noise in the world ; and what's more, here's all these lands dangling in the future, if—well, God Almighty knows, I don't, whether it will be or no ; however that be, Jem, you see he was likely to be caught up, and it may be, that this big earl has got him policy-wise, d'ye see ? There ain't so many brains going begging now-a-days, specially 'mong the Tory lot,—nay, or so much money as used to be ; d'ye understand, Jem ? "

" That's all very well, father, but I've more faith in Mr. Berthon ; lawyers ain't fools, even among the women."

Letty felt very curious to see the bride. She went over and knelt before the old man. " Dear father, don't speak unkindly of the lady, may be she's not bad."

" Very well, Cherry, I won't say no more about it, if you say so ; you're always coming over me with your coaxing ways, Letty, and there's a kiss for you ; but you don't know the big world, child, and what a deep game they play, those proud folks : there's more

play after a moneyed fool in London town, than a stray whale on the flats, I can tell you. Ask Mr. Landon—ah, he knows by this time, though he be the wisest man I ever knowed.”

“Mrs. Treherne showed me all over the rooms, father, when I took up the fish this morning ; she said she wouldn’t mind showing me, because she knew we should all be talking of ‘Master George’ to-night. Such flowers, father ! like the church at harvest time, roses all over the—”

“Well, Letty.”

“All over the room, father :—is that baby ? I must see,” and Letty rose and went into the next room.

Jem smiled. “I wonder,” he said after a pause, “why Mr. Landon stays so long abroad ; he’s been gone these fifteen months or more.”

“Because he can’t find much peace in this world, I guess,” replied the grey old man ; “he wasn’t made for it, Jem. God Almighty is wise, but his best servants have strange measure, sometimes, I’m inclined to think. You see, he’s fond of this boy, and would like him to be a great man, I know, and this fine marriage may or may not help him on.”

“Did you know Mr. Reginald Berthon ?” Jem asked, after another long pause, during which Letty returned and resumed her seat by his side : the cradle-cot had been removed into their sleeping apartment.

“Know him, ’course I did ; knowed him as well as any of ’em ; he was a good-looking fellow, not much brains though, to my mind.”

“I’ve heard say that perhaps he’s alive.”

The old man smiled.

“Alive, d’ye say, Jem ? if’s he’s alive, so’s Noah ; and more likely than not, he, for they’re building them

iron arks all over the place. No, Jem, he did his work and went down with the rest : God Almighty ! warn't there a row at the house when he carried off the old man's daughter ! Ah ! Jem, she were something to look at, I tell ye. If there were an angel in the world, 'twas Miss Gertrude Landon, poor thing ! poor thing !"

"Why, father, was she very unhappy ?"

"Worse 'an that, Letty : God Almighty made her an angel, as I said, and she became—but there, it ain't no use digging up the dead—she went off with the young officer, you see, and no one in this world knows to this day, what she didn't do !"

"What do you mean, father ? sure, she married him, if she ran away."

"May be, may be, Letty : some say, no. It won't be in my time, but there'll come a burst-up about it some day, I know : I see'd it in *his* face, long time since."

"Whose face, father ?"

"Why, Mr. Landon's, who's else, Letty ? You see, these 'ere estates are 'tailed,' as the lawyers say, and their's no heir, certain, so to speak."

"No heir, father ? why, what then is Mr. George ?"

"What then, Jem ? Go and ask the sea that's booming out there—sounds heavy too, to-night, equinox, s'pose—t'will have to be fought out some day."

"Is it generally known ?"

"Not about here, Letty ; but there be folks in London that has their eyes open, and I'm sorry for 'im—sorry for 'im !"

"But whose son is this Mr. Berthon ?" asked Letty, who was becoming intensely interested.

"It's a long story, child, and I only know half, and the ends's about as likely false as not, for the whole

world lies, as you know, Letty, and thirty thousand pounds a year ain't to be let slip without a struggle. I believe it stands thus—you never see'd Mr. Maynard, John Maynard, the big Radical lawyer, but no matter, I did : well, you see, he married another daughter of Sir George's, by his second wife, and so he ain't very friendly—more's the pity—with Mr. Landon, that now is, for he's as proud as a king, is Mr. Landon, and this fellow is like a blustering sou'-wester, Jem. Well, there's children there, and if Mr. Landon has no children—and his sister was—never married," the old man said, with a great gulp, which he tried to make out was the tobacco smoke, "you see, the lands must go, and Master George knows nothing about it, either way."

"But why was she not married, father? who says so?"

"John Maynard says so, as I guess, Letty, from what Mr. Landon has told me, and John Maynard ain't a man to talk in the dark. Mr. Landon thought I could be of use to him in the matter, and when he came to me, with that great mind of his, I knew he couldn't be very easy about it. You see, they crossed Channel, and she died shortly afterwards; and there's bad evidence, some say, lying somewhere, and links that Mr. Landon can't get: but there's a deal behind all that, which I know little of, and ain't going to speak about; they was rum times, and the child he brought over may 'ave been one, or may 'ave been t'other. Heaven help the right, I say, and God bless Master George, who's worth the land ten times over, and John Maynard, to boot. Lord! how that sea is booming! must be up the cliffs, Jem, eh?"

But Jem was gazing steadily into the fire, and said

nothing. Letty roused his attention to his father's inquiry, and he got up with a start.

"Up the cliffs, father!—let's go and see. There was to be a high tide to-night; put your shawl over your head, Letty, and come outside."

The old man knocked out the ashes of his pipe, and, without any covering on his head, followed his son and daughter out of the cottage. The wind, which had freshened to a gale, blew his grey locks behind him, and Jem had to steady Letty with his arm, which he held round her waist, while they mounted the bank which sheltered their dwelling, and went on to the high ground above, facing the sea.

"Look down there!" he said, holding her firmly, while he pointed below. Stray clouds that had lain on the horizon had come up with the gale, and were careering across the sinking moon. The wind blew in great gusts from the sea, and in the dim light below they could see the big trees waving and sheets of white foam rise and fall. "It's not very rough," he said; "'twas calm as a pond at nine, but when the high tides are in, it comes up the cliffs like a water-spout."

At that moment they heard the great boom of the heavy waves upon the cliff, and there rose like a ghost from the roaring gloom a pillar of snow-white foam, which the wind caught, and flung far upwards, till even it fell upon their faces like rain.

"How terrible!" said Letty in a whisper; "yet how still it seems out at sea. Can you see any ships, Jem?"

"Nothing in shore to-night," said the old man, answering, shading his face with his hand. "I

wouldn't give much for a bark to wind'ard of the Iron Bars or Black Craggs with this tide. I guess Mr. Landon will be pretty savage that they're doing nothing with the life-boat house since he left."

"I was thinking whether we shouldn't write, father," said the son.

"How good and kind of him it was to think of it!" said Letty, still clinging with a beating heart to her husband's stout arm, and inwardly thanking God that he was not at sea.

"Yes, it was, Letty, noble of him."

"Ah! and he cared more about that sort o' thing than the peerage they offered him t'other day, I know," interposed the old fisherman, turning back again to go home. "He told me, the last time he was here, that them commissioners was raising difficulties; but he'll build the house, he will, and we shall as certain have that boat—aye, and I know the name he's goin' to call it—as his name is Landon: some men doan't mean what they say—but *he* do. Come in, children, it blows cold, and it's nigh midnight."

"Stay, father," said Letty; "what is that light yonder, on the hill?"

"Why, you silly child, it's from the big house, that is; d'ye see the edge of that great tower all white against the sky?"

• "How the wind must sound in those dreadful towers!—how frightened that poor young lady will be in that big house!"

"Frightened, Letty—why? Would you be frightened with me?" said Jem.

"Not with you, Jem, of course," she said.

"And hasn't she Mr. George Berthon, Letty, to take care of her?"

"I forgot," she said, laughing as he folded her closer in her shawl. "But I am glad we are in the cottage."

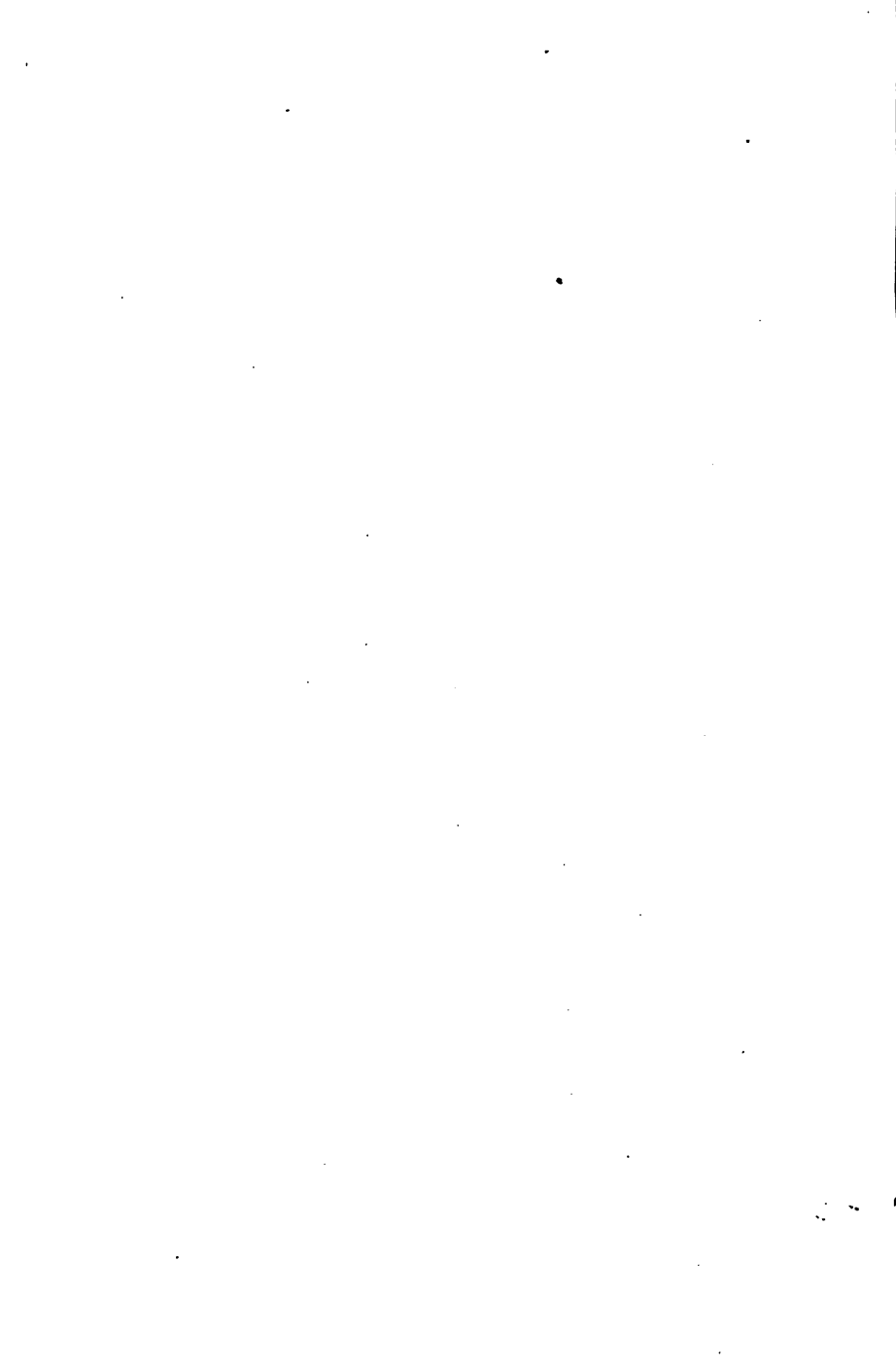
"Aye," grumbled the old man, "you're right, Letty: old Jem's cottage is better than Ilceston Towers any day—ask Mr. Landon!"

END OF BOOK I.

BOOK II.

"The even carriage between two factions proceedeth not always of moderation, but of a trueness to a man's self, with end to make use of both."

BACON.



CHAPTER I.

*"Let Whig and Tory stir their blood;
There must be stormy weather."*

WILL WATERPROOF'S LYRICAL MONOLOGUE.

"I TELL you what it is," said Mr. Robert Smythe, kicking the thick white dust off his top-boots in the long grass, "whatever the proverb may be, it's a precious short lane as has no turning, sir; and if ever there was a road that wound and twisted to all eternity about the country, it's this one. Here's the stile, Mr. Wittithorne, and I'm going home by the fields; what do you say?"

That individual took off his tall white hat, and wiped his pearly brow with a silk handkerchief, and then he said—

"Well, I've something more to say to you, Mr. Smythe, and so I'll come part of the way with you; I daresay you've a glass of cider at the lodge you can give me, for I'm as dry as a toast-rack."

"Any amount," said Mr. Smythe, and he proceeded to clamber over the stile. "I hate stiles!" he exclaimed; "they're half-and-half, neither one thing nor t'other, like women."

"I can't get over them as I used to," said Mr. Wittithorne, resting his short fat little corpus half-way, and looking woefully over the broad expanse of

his white waistcoat at the leg which was still dangling over the wrong side.

"You drink too much," observed Mr. Smythe cynically—"or it's your wife!" and he walked on, whistling in a low musical key.

The path through the field led up to the brow of a slight hill, from the other slope of which there was a magnificent view of the great valley that traverses Lingwoodshire from the north to the sea.

"The most beautiful spot in England," said Mr. Smythe, seating himself carefully on the grass.

Mr. William Wittithorne followed his example, first spreading out his ample silk handkerchief beneath him. There was something supremely good-natured in the face of that little gentleman. Mr. Smythe used to observe that you could see by one glance at his shining countenance that he had been joined for twenty-five years to a partner stronger minded than himself. Whatever the qualifications of his lady might be, she was greatly esteemed by him, and was the most perfect hostess of a country inn one could wish for. They have a very pretty daughter, by-the-by, by name Easter, and their address is "The Old Oak," Haddingford, Lingwoodshire. Mr. Wittithorne was not unaccustomed to public speaking; and, when he was excited, his lively short crisp hair and crimson face were said to impart to his whole aspect a dignity which was all the more striking because it was the most unaffected in the world.

"Mr. Smythe," said he after a pause, "do you expect visitors up at the house?"

"None that I know of: we're full already; why?"

"As I came down in the train, I saw Mr. Maynard, and I thought I saw your trap waiting at the station."

"Very likely you did see both, but I see no connection 'twixt the two," and Mr. Smythe, who was chewing grass, turned round and looked his companion significantly in the face.

"Fienne Park?" said Mr. Wittithorne.

Mr. Smythe nodded, and turned away again.

"It looks pretty from here, doesn't it?" he remarked, pointing over the hill to a picturesque house whose white front, trailed with ivy and surrounded with a green verandah, was gleaming to the west through the trees on the other side of the valley.

"Very different from Lord Fienne's," observed Mr. Wittithorne; "but I like it better."

"Think you did!" said Mr. Smythe contemptuously, "I'd rather have the lodge at St. Cecily's than the grandest saloons at that place—and *he's* there, the old fox," he muttered to himself wonderingly.

Bob Smythe's reflection was not unnatural, considering that while he would have been lost among the crowd of domestics and officials at Fienne House, he was, for the present and likely to remain, bailiff, game-keeper, park-keeper and head gardener in one, at St. Cecily's.

"I think he married the wrong one after all," he said after a pause, and as if continuing a previous train of reflection aloud. "I tell you what it is, Will, I've an unprejudiced observation of women, and I say that Lady Nora is the handsomest girl I've ever seen; there!"

"The other looks better in blue," replied Mr. Wittithorne decidedly.

"Hang your blue!" exclaimed the other with a ferocity which startled his companion in no small degree. "We ain't always electioneering, are we? I

tell you she's the handsomest and finest woman of the two, and when it comes to the scratch, you'll say so too; so don't let's argufy about it, Mr. Wittithorne."

That little gentleman readily acceded; and Bob Smythe relapsed into his reverie, and chewed grass more vehemently than before. Then said Mr. Wittithorne—

"Mr. Grey comes down to me yesterday, and begins talking about the election, and he seemed to me to be of your opinion."

"Head-over-heels!" replied Bob curtly, "but he won't get her," he continued, "any more than Lord Eustace will marry Miss Delessert, who's of the sentimental swooning sort, and no kind of go in her,—which is most women." And he stared the husband and father beside him defiantly in the face.

"Why do people go into politics?" he exclaimed; "for the next fortnight the place won't be fit to live in, and your life isn't worth a bit of blue or yellow ribbon; honest men manufacturing lies by the bushel, and spouting themselves hoarse for hours together to get a few uncertain votes, which are bought up behind your back the next minute at five shillings apiece by a chap as has never opened his mouth, and from the very people who believe in you more than your enemy, and in the five shillings more than in either; bah!"

To answer this burst of eloquence would have been a great delight to Mr. Wittithorne in any other person than Bob Smythe, whom not quite understanding, as a most ardent politician himself, he feared to exasperate and so alienate a possible future ally.

"Now then, look here," continued Bob, "here's my master, Mr. Berthon, with everything a man can

want to make him happy : youth, and health, and friends, and a profession that he knows how to make money out of—and a wife that's—better than most," he added, after a moment's hesitation, "and yet he must needs go headlong into politics, and break his neck in a steeplechase with a set of d—d scoundrels ; it's monstrous !" And Mr. Smythe tugged vehemently at his necktie, and converted a neat bow into an unmanageable knot.

"But he's safe to get in?" said Mr. Wittithorne.

"You think so, do you?" said Bob, cynically.

His companion eyed him askance, as if that anti-political individual was the repository of some dreadful party-secret which threatened "the cause."

"I don't say but how the young fellow's up to the mark," observed George Berthon's factotum ; "he's a trump card, is Master George, though I say it,—and Lor' bless you, there be as good fish out of the sea, as ever went into it !"

The proverb sounded strange to Mr. Wittithorne's ears, but he could not tell why. Both men were silent for awhile ; then mine host remarked—

"You don't think he'll get in, Mr. Smythe ; why?"

"Because he's honest," said Bob, dryly.

The other stared, and he went on : "He says he won't spend a farthing, and he means it,—for the present, at all events. Do you suppose he's any chance against Fienne's money bags and your friend Spriggs?"

"D—n Spriggs," thought the publican, but he did not say it.

"I know 'im," muttered the bailiff of St. Cecily's, significantly pointing with his thumb across towards Fienne Park ; "*he's* as deep as a river,—and cute as—as

—the devil, confound 'im !” And with this most unprovoked expletive, which was not, however, meant for Spriggs, Bob Smythe jumped up, and expressed his intention of moving.

“Now, look here, Mr. Wittithorne,” he said, when they were on their way across the field, and once more renewing a fallen conversation, “I’m not going to talk myself, for I mean to have a pipe ; let me see, your wife objects to smoking, so I won’t expect you to,—but you just tell me what your idea is of how Mister George got into this scrape, and I’ll listen ; most of it happened ’afore I come.”

“Well you see,” replied the other, pulling the creases out of his waistcoat, and assuming the gravest look of importance, “there’s been a split in the camp some time, and old Mr. Richard Fienne that died the other day had a near touch of being upset last election. I never heard speak of Mr. Berthon before last winter, except the few days he came to St. Cecily’s, when he came back from abroad with his young wife after the honeymoon. He was lucky in being in that great Will case, you remember, about Christmas-time, that went up to the House of Lords afterwards, and made such a stir ; well, he came out strong, I hear, in that, and ’twas easy enough to see he’d got ‘the gift of the gab,’ in those speeches he made down here on the School question, at Easter time. Well, Squire Longfield over at Leatham, took him up strong, and half-a-dozen other swells, who were looking out then for a fight, and Mr. Fienne was breaking up already. You see, he was a London man, a son-in-law of Lord Celadon, and all that, and down here I can tell you he and his beautiful young wife made a wonderful impression ; there was something *in* them, and polite-

ness for everybody—different from that stuck-up lot at ‘the House.’ He seemed to drop from the clouds just in the nick of time; the first time I heard him speak, at the opening of those new schools,—I saw the stuff he was made of, and thought to myself ‘he’s just cut out for the work of bowling over the lot of ‘em.’ Not that the swells took to him as a likely candidate, you know, but they wanted his brains and tongue, but Lor’ bless you, Mr. Smythe, he wasn’t one to follow where he could lead,—and so independent that I thought at one time he’d make enemies of the lot; but then there was that something about him,—‘culture,’ I think they call it,—which was a sort of washdown with the old aristocratic-nation people, along with his cutting arguments that they seemed to be pleased with him even when they was most surprised, you see. And so it happened that with one thing and another, they looked to him when the news came of the death, and put him forward before ever young Mr. Fienne turned up. The fact is, the place has been a regular pocket-borough for such a time, that there’s a stir about it, and though the Fienes have a strong party, and no end of money, and the patronage of this new government—a set of cheese-paring, confiscating wretches as they are—I think there’ll be a jolly fight for it.”

Mr. Wittithorne stopped at the gate which led into the road, to wipe away from his face, glowing with his mental and bodily exertions, the perspiration which his incipient philippic against “the enemy” had caused, and then continued, while his companion smoked on with philosophic calm—

“I know it went sorely against Mr. Berthon to

oppose his cousin, but he was pressed, you see, and young Mr. Fienne wasn't even in the field. Let me see, he's his wife's second cousin, I think I've heard, so there's not much relationship. Lor' bless you, Mr. Smythe, there'll be a devil of a row yet; we're only beginning."

"Right you are for once," muttered Bob Smythe, "more's the pity; politics is ruin, says I, and I think my master's a fool, and I tell 'im so as plain as I can," he added, apologetically. "Look you here, Mr. Wittithorne, that fellow that's come down to day—you know who I mean—will move heaven and earth to keep out your man, so I advise you to look after your windows, or change the committee-rooms—that's all I've got to say."

"You know him then?"

"Know John Maynard? Think I did! I hate politics, but I'd be anything to go against him. If he's what you call a Radical, Mr. Wittithorne, why then I say that a Radical means a rascal, d—d if I don't."

With that Mr. Smythe knocked the ashes out of his pipe against a wooden post, with such violence that he smashed the clay to pieces, and then trod it into the dust, with as much gusto as he undoubtedly would have done Mr. John Maynard's high black hat, if he had had the chance.

"Look here," exclaimed Mr. Wittithorne, looking up at the board, "I'm blessed if they haven't stuck up the address here this afternoon."

Bob Smythe pulled back the shooting-cap from his brows, where it had fallen in his struggle with the vanquished pipe, and, seeing his master's name printed at the foot of the bill, he stared at it too, and listened

with a puzzled expression of mingled curiosity and astonishment, whilst the other read aloud the following :—

“TO THE ELECTORS OF HADDINGFORD.

“GENTLEMEN,

“In consequence of the repeated invitation of a large and influential body of the Electors of this Borough, I have the honour of coming forward to offer myself as a Candidate for the representation of Haddingford, in this present Parliament, vacant by the death of the late lamented Mr. Richard Fienne.

“I am conscious of the comparatively short time during which I have enjoyed the personal acquaintance of most of you, as well as of my own short-comings in those qualities which a long and honourable tradition has familiarized you with, as belonging to those who aspire to the high post of representing your interests in the National Assembly ; but from our knowledge of each other hitherto, I am bold enough to hope and believe that the course of time will strengthen the bonds of sympathy and friendship between us : and, if the single pursuit and persistent advocacy of your interests, as identified with the national welfare, can atone for any want of personal social standing, or early acquaintance between us, I may hope to prove myself not unworthy of the trust it is my great privilege to ask you to confide in me on this most important occasion.

“During the time which must elapse before the actual election, I shall have ample opportunity of explaining to you at length the opinions I hold, and am prepared to advocate, upon the momentous public

questions of the day, so that there is no need for me to dwell upon them at the present moment. I base my claims on your consideration solely upon the impartial judgment which you will pass upon those opinions, as affecting your private and public interests, when I shall enlarge upon them to you, and would not for one moment take my stand upon mere party shibboleths, which no intelligent representative of the national will in Parliament would presume at the present day to give expression to in the House of Commons.

"I do not appear as the nominee of a party, but am a candidate for the suffrages of those who value the free expression of independent thought ; and I would impress upon the voters of every shade in Haddingford, that I am prepared to uphold the present Government so far, and so far only, as they justify in my opinion that support which must be given according to my ideas of our present national wants, of the necessity of the continued absolute efficiency of the Public Services, of a dignified and consistent foreign policy, of the claims of immediate and careful legislation on the part of our home policy with respect to the Poor Laws and Education, and of the due regulation and representation of the rights of the community, as I shall to the best of my ability candidly unfold them to you in the course of my canvass.

"That man is my enemy and yours who shall seek to gain my return by one overt or indirect act of intimidation or bribery.

"If you fairly consider my honourable opponent more fit to represent you at the present crisis, it will be my pleasure to approve of your choice. If I should have the happiness of your approval, I shall

devote my life and abilities with delight to the furtherance of your interests, and those of the empire.

"I have the honour to be, gentlemen,
"Your obedient servant,
"GEORGE BERTHON."

"Old Oak" Committee Rooms,
Haddingford, August, 18—."

"Not bad," said Bob Smythe calmly, drawing his hands out of his deep pockets.

"He's the right sort," replied Mr. Wittithorne, licking his lips at the prospect of the coming fray.

"Here comes Spriggs!" observed the other, looking down the road.

"Where?" exclaimed his companion, with the disturbed air of one who contemplated an immediate encounter with the enemy.

"Gone down the High Street," returned Bob, after a moment's reconnoitre of a distant figure in top boots, a velveteen coat, and an American wide-awake.

"Well, well, Mr. Smythe, 'intimidation and bribery,' that's the ticket!" he continued, reading passages of the address again out loud, and looking as if he meant to intimidate every man, woman, and child on the opposite side with a vengeance. "He's as safe as a house, to get in, by Jove! he is. There, after that address, I'd stake my—my wife's life upon it, Mr. Smythe."

"Dare say you would, thankfully," observed the cynical gamekeeper.

"I mean there's no chance of failure, Mr. Smythe, that's what I mean."

"Well, well, say your say, man. Good-bye, I'm

off. Shows how much you know about it," he muttered, as he strode away up the hill in the direction of St. Cecily's.

Thereupon Mr. William Wittithorne read the address carefully again, and then went home, forgetting all about the cider.



CHAPTER II.

"You pretend the public, but mean yourself." PROV.

THE sun of a most brilliant September morning was streaming through the trees of Fienne Park, and flecking the velvet sward with streaks and patches of glittering emerald light ; a wing of the old-fashioned Elizabethan house appeared at the end of an oak avenue, its small-paned windows gleaming between dark masses of ivy ; it was yet early, and the heavy dew of the night before lay upon the tall grass in the shade of the tree-stems. On every side the view was bounded by belts of stately trees, from the depths of whose foliage and the thick covert of the shrubberies came the songs of many hundreds of happy birds, while above them rose the distant cooing of the wood pigeons from the lower slopes ; and the dark mystery of the ilex was occasionally disturbed by the rush of pheasant-wings ; these beautiful creatures seemed tame in the vicinity of the house, and disported their brilliant plumage in the sunlight without fear of molestation. Coming from the direction of the mansion were the figures of two men, engaged in earnest conversation, and indifferent to the scamper of the squirrels up the gnarled trunks of the old oaks as

they approached, or the hasty reconnoitre of the stoat as he dived into the congenial darkness of the rhododendrons.

The elder of the two might have been a man of about fifty years ; he wore no hair on his full face, and the broad brim of his black felt wide-a-wake gave to him almost the appearance of a priest ; but a big black satin bow took the place of the clerical neck-tie, and the quick play of his keen dark eye lent to his features a severe and slightly sinister expression. He wore a loose shooting coat, and walked slowly along with his hands joined behind him, and with the air of one who was fully alive to the portliness of his own not undignified figure. This individual was John Maynard, the great Radical lawyer, one of the leading counsel at Westminster, and Member of Parliament for Crowdingham. The young man who walked by his side with a cigar in his mouth, and who was assisting his forcible arguments now and then with swishing an elegant walking-stick, was the Hon. Maurice Fienne.

"What do you think of the address?" said the latter.

"Too clever by half," replied the other, who talked without moving a muscle of his face, and kept his eyes fixed apparently on the toes of his highly polished boots, "too clever by half ; a string of the vaguest generalities. This new independent line goes down with nobody ; its either delusion, or hypocrisy ; with the old positions no longer tenable, these young Tories go in for independent opinions, because they have not the pluck to come over to us."

"He has lost no time about it."

"And had none to lose ; we must keep up to the mark, or we shall be close pressed yet. I admire the

fellow's enterprise, but his impertinence in coming forward beats anything I ever heard. He reminds me of poor Street, a local attorney of Crowdingham, who at the last election, before the candidates went down, issued an address, and had the insolence to drive about the town. The reception he met with a day or two later probably convinced him that his absurd placards were the nearest approach to Parliament he was ever likely to make."

Fienne laughed, and then he said in the slow measured tones of a voice that even to men was often deep and musical.

"I saw something of him in town, you know, before he married; he seemed to me a gentlemanly self-possessed fellow, but confoundedly conceited: I cannot say I disliked him though."

A slight smile appeared for a moment on the stolid features of the lawyer, and passed as it came.

"A chip of the old block, and too carefully cut to lack the Landon's one characteristic: there is no hypocrisy like that modern courtesy which insults you with a smile of politeness."

Had Fienne not been too busily employed in tapping off the ash of his cigar with his cane—an operation he performed to a nicety—to notice it, he might have observed his companion's teeth to close with a savage grip on those last words.

"I don't think a man can be too civil," he remarked quietly.

Mr. Maynard was too absorbed in his own thoughts to notice the observation. After a pause he observed.

"Have you called at St. Cecily's?"

Fienne looked at him, surprised.

"No; how could I?—" and then he added in a

lower tone, as if speaking to himself, "I wish I could."

"Why?" asked the other, quickly.

"Oh, nothing," replied Fienne with a smile on his delicate lips. "I am lonely here sometimes, and have a fancy for a game of croquet."

"Is your cousin, Lady Nora, there?"

"She is."

"Very handsome, I believe?"

"She is, and the most charming woman in the world."

"A friend of your sister's?"

"Not very intimate; my sister is a saint—Nora Celadon, I am happy to say, a sinner."

"You are orthodox, I see."

"In politics," returned Fienne, half perceiving the irony.

"Cousinship is an awkward relationship," observed the lawyer, after a pause.

"Perhaps so, and therefore convenient."

"If we ever had a chance of any thing like a new constitution for our rotten Church, and could remodel our marriage laws, I would prohibit the marriage of cousins."

"Within what degree, and for what cause?"

"First cousins—and perhaps those once removed."

"Well, for what reason?"

"I am neither a moralist nor a physiologist, but I would do it for the sake of political logic and social convenience."

"Indeed, and expect society to accept your theory,"

"They might do as they liked about that; they should accept the practice."

"I don't believe in the objection," returned Fienne,

rather dryly, "it is a crotchet of philosophers, a bone of contention among medical men."

"You possibly find it convenient so to regard it."

"I find it impossible to reason upon the subject at all."

"We won't discuss it now; what relation is Lady Nora to yourself?"

"Her mother is a first cousin of mine. I do not recognize the relationship."

"Perhaps you want clear ground to establish a new one?"

"You are a cool hand, Mr. Maynard, certainly; but I have no objection in telling you that I was thinking of it."

"You don't believe in woman's love, do you?"

The question would have startled most people, and perhaps Maurice Fienne might have been astonished at it from any one but his present companion; however, he hesitated a moment, and then replied with some degree of warmth.

"Yes, I do; it is one of the few things left me to believe in."

Had John Maynard been anyone else but John Maynard he would have been struck with the half-sigh and the tone in which the young man at his side spoke; as it was, he merely observed,

"It won't last long," and then, with the same imperturbable coolness, "had I thought it, I should not have spoken of the matter; but cousins' marriages are undesirable."

"According to political logic?"

"—And social convenience."

"Ah, yes; you said you did not wish to argue the question, Mr. Maynard, nor do I; but if you would

like my opinion summed up, it is this: I do not believe that Nature any more than Religion can be at war with Science; where two beings feel a natural attachment to one another which, were they themselves only concerned, would lead them to marry, no argument can convince me that Nature afterwards revenges herself upon them. I think that proposition is incontrovertible."

"Is that all?"

"Yes," and he smoked on in silence.

"I will consider your proposition, and return to it at some future time—with your permission."

"As you like," replied Fienne, coolly, and the subject dropped.

"Now then, tell me what you promised last night, respecting Berthon and Landon," said Fienne suddenly.

"You will only know it a little sooner than the rest of the world," replied the other. "What relationship do you suppose them to stand in towards each other?"

"Uncle and nephew, of course; stop—are you not a brother-in-law of Mr. Landon?"

"I was," returned Maynard, laconically, "Berthon is Landon's son."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Fienne, stopping in his walk, and turning his dark eyes on the other's placid face.

"So say some others too," he replied, in the same cool tone.

"And who was his wife?"

"Landon's? he never had any."

"And who was Berthon's mother?"

"Possibly you never heard of her—Isabel de Mont-

morency," returned the Casuist, this time with a slight effort.

"What the great beauty and poetess, whom my father speaks of?"

"The same: what do you think of it?"

"I am puzzled beyond measure: how do you know it?"

"As I cannot ask you to believe it on any other ground than my personal assurance, so I am not able to explain to you the links in the chain."

"You are not in court," said Fienne, with a slight sneer.

The fire for a moment danced in the lawyer's keen eyes; then he coughed away a slight laugh, and passed his arm in that of his companion as he spoke.

"My dear Maurice, you know I am interested in you; well, Landon will be returning to England next spring, and he is the most unscrupulous man living; he is an aristocrat—I hate him! This boy, you see, cannot take the entailed property as his natural son, so he has passed him off as the child of his sister, Gertrude Berthon, a feather-brained girl who ran away with a fool in the army, but was never married to him; she died in giving birth to a stillborn child abroad; I have the proofs. If Landon could know what I know, he would never have been fool enough to try this game. As it stands, my children are the heirs of the estates through their mother, Frances Landon; but that is nothing. What I was determined you should know is, that this fellow Berthon is an upstart, and he not only is trying to oust you in this election, but will be a thorn in your flesh if you marry his wife's sister. Your cousin Lady Celadon is a woman among ten thousand, but her husband with

whom Landon is hand in glove, is the mainstay of the Toryism whose obsolete nonsense is undermining the aristocracy, and the exponent of political principles which in my opinion constitute him a public enemy. I would save you from contact with a party whose star is steadily waning ; your own should be going up."

But Fienne was too surprised at the revelation he had heard to notice the last remark. He thought it best, however, to control himself and merely said,

"You astound me ; I must have time to measure the significance of what you tell me. As regards the election, I am in your hands. What do you propose to do ?"

"You are short of money ?"

"Well, the world thinks us rich ; we are not that, just now at all events."

"You are sure of victory, but it will cost money ; and it would be a great thing to remove the opposition."

"Undoubtedly," said Fienne with a laugh ; "but you don't contemplate that possibility, do you ?"

"Yes ; I do. I shall go and see Berthon after lunch, and see if he is to be moved."

"You surprise me more and more," said the other, flinging himself upon a grassy knoll in the sunlight.

John Maynard quietly smiled, and looked round him with a feeling something akin to admiration, as he stood, at the sylvan magnificence which surrounded them.

"I must go in and write my letters," he presently observed, looking at his watch.

"You can order your horse, then, if you are determined to go to St. Cecily's this afternoon."

"Thank you, I prefer the walk. Do you remain here?"

"Yes; for the present. When is the next meeting of the committee?"

"To-morrow morning, at the 'Eagle,' at eleven o'clock."

"A parcel of fools!"

"You are right. You and I are the committee, but committees want a chorus like any other burlesque. Good-bye till lunch then."

Maurice Fienne watched the portly figure of the lawyer slowly vanish between the trees; he then threw himself on his back, and, with a sigh of intense relief, gave himself up to dreams of Nora Celadon, damning the fate that brought their relationship within range of the shafts of John Maynard's sarcasm.



CHAPTER III.

*"Women! Help heaven! men their creations mar
In profiting by them. Nay, call us ten times frail;
For we are soft as our complexions are,
And credulous to false prints."*

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

A LAWN like a billiard-table for smoothness, marked into shaded greens by the gardener's roller, and watered and mown into the perfection of velvety turf, lying half in the shadow of the house and half in the sunlight, bounded by a shrubbery on the right, flower-beds brilliant with purple and crimson and gold in front, and the half sweep of a carriage-drive on the left; a

lawn covered with croquet-hoops and stray mallets and vagrant balls of smooth-polished boxwood banded with red and blue, and tenanted by a single slight figure in trailing white muslin and a black sash, who at one end of the ground was taking aim at the "bell" from under a waving straw hat with a bunch of moss-roses in front, and a floating black and white veil behind, and who seemed to be gravely measuring the distance with a pair of large dreaming eyes set in a pale interesting face ; such was the scene which met Harley Grey's quiet contemplative gaze, as he lay at full length in the shade, utterly lazy in all but the light thoughts of summer, and flowers, and croquet, and of the said graceful white figure not far from him, which sailed up with the wreaths of pale-blue smoke from his cigar into the delicious air.

"There, Mr. Grey, you could not do that!" she said, as the little brass bell tinkled shrilly, and the ball sped through the crossed hoop into the lilac bushes beyond.

"I am happy to say I could not."

"Why?" said the girl, swinging the mallet in her delicate white hand.

"Croquet would lose its charm," he said, laughing, "if the women could not bully the men with their superior play."

It would be strange, indeed, if a girl in the freshness of youth could not look ordinarily interesting in the sweet summer costume of Marion Delessert, and amid the sweet summer scene that surrounded her ; and Harley Grey confessed that the slight form was graceful and fair which stood before him, and the soft woman's voice as musical as the birds' who chirped and tweeped in the laburnum overhead.

"I am afraid I forget to take advantage of that fact with you," she replied, advancing towards him.

It was more than probable that Miss Delessart would have been very backward at bullying anyone, much less the particular individual whom she addressed.

"What are you reading, Mr. Grey?" she asked, pointing to a volume lying on the grass beside him; "you are never without a book."

"Nothing," he replied, looking up.

"What a story, Mr. Grey!" she returned, knocking the book in question playfully towards her with her mallet.

"You don't generally read books without opening them?"

"But you meant to open it, and it's very unsociable of you; and I shall take it away. What! *you* reading a French novel? I thought you never read novels."

"Indeed! may I ask why?"

"O," (with a slight blush) "I thought you were too serious—too—clever."

"Good gracious, Miss Delessart, you pay me a very bad compliment! did you expect me to bring 'Johnson's Dictionary' into the garden?"

"No, not exactly; but I thought you would be reading 'Pope,' or 'Homer,'" she added doubtfully, "or perhaps be writing a poem."

("That unlucky volume!" thought Harley; "to publish a book is to carry it slung round your neck all your life.")

"I can't do two things at once," he said aloud; "read a poem and write one at the same time."

"No; but you deny you were reading."

"Perhaps so ; out of *that* book."

"What poem then do you mean ?"

"The garden and yourself," he replied, with a careless look into the depths of the eyes which immediately fell from his own.

"O, Mr. Grey, you are incorrigible!" she said, turning away after her ball, but with a pleased feeling at the not ungraceful compliment which Harley had not the slightest idea of causing.

Why will two young people make common-place generalities such important conversation when they happen to be alone in each other's company? Marion Delessert came on to the lawn to knock the balls about, quite unconscious that a young man, whose company was generally agreeable to her, was smoking his cigar in convenient proximity to the croquet hoops.

"Where are the others?" he asked, as the young lady in white muslin came slowly across the grass again, wondering in her innocent mind whether she might ask him to play a game with her alone.

"O, somewhere about," she answered vaguely, slightly disappointed at his question. "Nora is writing a letter, and Mr. Berthon has carried Lilian off to show her some news he has just got about this stupid election ; I don't know where Lord Lisle is."

But Harley did not seem to notice that she was standing idly opposite him, and was occupied in smoking a big wasp who had come to inspect the meaning of the bright yellow patch where Marion had thrown the French novel on the grass.

"Mr. Grey," she said timidly.

"Miss Delessert," (looking up with a smile).

"Will you have a game with me, till those lazy

people come and join us ?" This was said with a mental reservation that she did not care about their coming.

"Certainly," (springing up and shaking himself).

"Which will you have, blue or red ?" she asked in her blindest manner, sailing gracefully away with her captive in the direction of the stick.

"It's all one to me ; no, it is not, I'll have whichever *you* like."

"I always play with 'one'—blue, so you must have red," (commandingly).

Miss Delessert began, and was soon two or three hoops ahead. Croquet, unlike chess or billiards, gives you full opportunity of observing and thinking of your companion, or opponent, whichever you like to call her, without paying the slightest attention to your own game ; a blessing Harley Grey did not fail to appreciate.

The usually pale thoughtful features of George Berthon's friend were browned with the gracious sun which he had so joyfully wooed on that pleasant lawn for the last ten days ; he looked well enough in his light grey suit in the eyes of the young lady, who paid him the high compliment of supposing him, because poetical, spiritually removed from the run of men. Marion Delessert flirted gracefully, with a sweet belief in her own charms, and looked upon the handsome ivory cross that swung from her swan-like neck as a sort of talisman, which invested all things pleasant with sanctity, and protected her own soft nature from any grossness from the world she found as delightful as she thought it wicked.

So they strolled about, nominally intensely excited over the game ; but to tell the truth, Marion sometimes had a doubt as to the hoop she was aiming at,

when Harley was beginning a carelessly complimentary speech for the twentieth time that afternoon ; whilst he himself, who was amused with the *naïvete* of this pretty creature—a new experience to him!—did not care two-pence as to what goal he was making for.

“When are you going ?” she asked in a pause in the play.

“Why, are you anxious for that event ?” he replied.

“Not particularly,” she said, with a most miserable attempt at irony.

“I shall stay like the moth, perhaps, till I have singed my wings at a pleasantly seductive flame,” he said, meaning very much less than Miss Delessert’s imagination immediately pictured.

“Please tell me, Mr. Grey.”

“Immediately after the election, if my presence does not get unbearable before then.”

“Dear me! that is one—Thursday week—two weeks yet ; I am very glad, because I think you want country air.”

“Thank you,” replied Harley, secretly annoyed that she looked on him as a sufferer from any other air, and never thinking that she was as great a hypocrite as himself.

“This life is so free and pleasant,” she said softly.

“Probably all life is so to you,” was the answer.

“Indeed, you are mistaken, Mr. Grey ; it depends entirely on——”

“Holloa, Grey !” shouted Eustace Celadon, springing from the library window, “what are you about ? here, we can’t allow you two to monopolize the croquet ground.”

Harley was not so particularly grieved at the interruption, as perhaps Miss Delessert would have liked him to be.

"George and the girls are coming directly. It is nearly half-past three o'clock; will you two join Nora and myself in the waggonette, at four; we are going over to Liston?"

Eustace Celadon looks as handsome as ever in his velveteen knickerbockers and Tyrolese hat, in which he has stuck the end of a peacock's plume; his voice sounds clear and ringing, and there is that bright sparkle in his eye, which tells of a mind free from care, and a heart—shall we say—from passion? Life's sweetest things as often chase the colour from the cheek, and the light from the brow, as its bitterest; we cannot love without care. Marion Delessert thinks him the beau ideal of manhood, but has no lively sympathy with his quick practical mind, and most unsentimental speech. To her he is a handsome stranger—a worldly careless man, with no poetry and no religion about him; she cannot imagine him kneeling at All Saints, or rapt in a hymn-tune, so she is generally quiet under his rallies, and would be "safe" with him alone in the middle of the Sahara.

Eustace laughs at her and does the mock courteous to this graceful saint, with a humour which she does not appreciate.

They consent to join the party in the waggonette. A minute later, George Berthon himself descended the steps from the house, with Nora leaning on his arm, and Lilian following with a pile of fruit for the refreshment of the croquet players.

"There was a time," she said playfully, with a pretty pout on her young red lips, "when the arm

would have been offered to *me*, and the peaches left to take care of themselves."

"May not I have even this little bit of him?" said Lady Nora, who looked like a queen with the glow of happiness on her fair face, and the sunlight like a crown upon the coils of her magnificent hair—she had come out without her hat—but without the slightest movement of releasing her brother-in-law, "you will make him so vain, Lilian, with your jealousies."

She lightly laughed, and deposited the glories of the kitchen-garden upon the sward. Harley, as he looked from one to the other, did not think that that fairest of fair women, whom George Berthon called wife, had much to fear from a comparison of herself with her sister.

"Let us see, we are six, are we not?" said Nora, counting the party; "I am not going to play myself, as I consider you young people want a chaperone to look on and keep you in order."

"That leaves five, and five, minus one, which is myself, leaves four."

"Oh, Mr. Berthon!" exclaimed Miss Delessert, as if his presence at the game was a matter of the keenest moment to her.

"I want a weed—a *quiet* weed—and I must look at the *Times*, which I have not seen to-day," replied George, with that abominable selfishness which characterizes married men.

Lilian shook her glossy tresses and laughed.

"You know you won't read a word, you old humbug!"

But George lit a cigar with a calm "Shall I not?" and unfolded the huge sheets with the air of a veritable paterfamilias.

"Here, Nora, come and sit in the shade ; it will leave us high and dry soon," he said, throwing himself at full length on to the grass.

The others reconciled themselves to fate, and Eustace was soon engaged in outraging Miss Delesert's most sacred theories ; a war to the knife ensued, albeit that they were partners in the game, and therefore unable to indulge in the usually congenial task of croqueting each other to the further end of the ground. Lilian played with Harley, who seemed grave, and Nora from her luxurious shade sucked peaches, and chaffed him cruelly.

Meanwhile the sun sloped round, and dropped towards the hills ; the hum of the bees grew drowsier, and the game declared itself more and more in favour of Lady Lilian and Harley.

"It is all your fault, Lord Lisle !" said Marion, angrily, as Eustace missed every shot, and laughed as one who thought it the best joke in the world.

"Can't you make that huge charm of yours do something for us ?" he asked, pointing to the cross which dangled over her poised foot.

What she would have said could only be guessed from the quick colour which rose in her cheeks, for at that moment George came up.

"I am sorry I must go," he said ; "there is a visitor come."

"Who ?"

Harley looked over his shoulder at the card, which bore the inscription—

"MR. JOHN MAYNARD, Q.C., M.P.,
REFORM CLUB."

CHAPTER IV.

*"I have heard you say,
Honour and policy, like unsever'd friends,
If the war do grow together : Grant that, and tell me,
In peace, what each of them by th'other lose,
That they combine not there."*

CORIOLANUS.

DESPITE their supposed relationship, George Berthon had never spoken to John Maynard in his life. It was true, Mr. Greville Landon had explained to him how the great lawyer had, ever so many years before, married Sir George Landon's daughter by his second wife, by whom he, John Maynard, had issue two daughters, both living, but neither of whom Berthon knew by sight ; how that he had been a widower some time, and that all intercourse of any kind had ceased long ago between the two men.

George had seen him often enough in London ; met him in society once or twice of late years, but no introduction on either side had taken place, and certainly for his part he wished for none. It was therefore with a feeling of great surprise that he read the name on the card ; and, as the servant added the message that he wished to see him on important private business, George Berthon's heart beat somewhat quicker than usual, and he desired his visitor to be shown into his study.

"My unannounced visit will doubtless have surprised you," said the great man, rising from the luxurious easy-chair into which he had thrown himself, and laying aside Whately's "Bacon," which he

had picked out of the book-case—"I only made up my mind an hour or two ago to see you, and the nature of my visit rendered it important that I should call on you at once; otherwise," he added, with a not unpleasant smile, "I should have written to ask your permission to renew, or rather to inaugurate, an acquaintance which the relationship between us justifies" (here he looked at George as much as to ask whether he had ever been made aware of that relationship, but there was no movement on the grave, handsome face before him); "and," he continued, "which I, for my part, should be very glad to have the benefit of."

"Please be seated," said Berthon, motioning his visitor to his chair again, and taking another for himself. "You need not apologize for your visit, Mr. Maynard; if it were merely for the purpose of making an acquaintance which circumstance, I presume, rather than design, has hitherto prevented between us, I should be very happy to receive you in my own house; but, as you have expressed a wish to see me upon some matter of importance, there is no reason why I should be surprised at your visit, beyond a certain curiosity to know the nature of it."

Mr. Maynard was not a man whose language often failed him, nor had he omitted, during his walk to St. Cecily's, to speculate upon the course which the interview he was seeking might take; but, with the practised eye of one whose boast it had been that he could tell the character and sometimes even the thoughts of a witness from a perusal of his features and expression, as he stepped into the box, he became at once aware that the light-hearted, frank, love-sick boy whom he had expected to find, was a

man of the world, perhaps as cool and keen as himself. As Berthon surveyed the portly figure of his visitor, the heavy chain and seals upon his high black waistcoat, the stiff white collar and satin neckcloth, and, surmounting a thick short neck, the heavy brows, the keen eyes, the deeply-scarred smooth cheeks and huge jaw of a face than which few have been more characteristic of the mind within—the thought for the moment uppermost was, “Is it possible that this man ever wedded a Landon?”

After a short pause, which served for a mutual reconnoitre, Mr. Maynard began—

“I do not for a moment suppose” (with a slight touch of irony) “that my relationship to you would give me a title to ask a favour of, or to influence you, in a matter touching my own personal interests; still, apart from my official cognizance of this impending election—of which the newspapers have doubtless made you aware—I had decided, after much deliberation, to come as a friend to invite you to consider the position you—unfortunately, I might say—find yourself in, as opposing the long standing claims of a man, now a relation of yours by marriage, to the representation of the borough: when I say, ‘consider the position you stand in’—my own parliamentary experience allows me to speak with some confidence of the state of affairs down here, and as I have no doubt that position must, during the last few days, have assumed in your own eyes an anomalous aspect—I assure you it is in all friendliness, and with a sincere consideration of your own best interests, that I hasten to offer you my assistance and advice.”

“You are a little ambiguous, Mr. Maynard, certainly,” George replied, crossing his legs, and looking

slightly amused ; "do you mean to say that in your present political capacity you come to offer my candidature the benefit of your assistance and advice ?"

"I do not look upon your candidature and yourself as quite identified," said Maynard, with a cold smile ; "it is to yourself privately, apart from those who are urging you to take this step, naturally enough, for their own purposes, that I have come to tender my friendly offices."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Maynard, but, before we proceed, allow me to disabuse your mind of the idea that there is anyone whatever influencing my free agency in this business."

This was said quickly and decidedly, and John Maynard began to doubt the expediency of his mission.

"Of course you naturally think so," he said, turning his eyes from observing Berthon's face, and playing with one hand with a paper-knife on the table, "but we will let that pass, if you like. I do not wish to be ambiguous or lengthy ; unfortunately my own political position is against me in this matter : had I nothing to do with politics I should have taken the same course." He paused for a moment, but Berthon did not assist his increasing embarrassment, and he was forced to proceed—

"The truth is, I consider, in the first place, that your candidature is hopeless ; and it grieves me to think that a young man like yourself, who have just added the cares of marriage to the unceasing anxiety and labour of a profession, in which I rejoice to see you succeeding,—should throw away time and energies and money in a struggle in which your own

friends are your opponents, and where you have no chance of success."

"Really, Mr. Maynard," replied Berthon, this time laughing, "your disinterestedness astounds me; if my candidature is hopeless,—to deal with one thing at a time,—it can hardly mar the prospects of your protégé, Mr. Fienne."

Three things in that short confident speech annoyed Mr. Maynard: he did not like being laughed at, "to deal with one thing at a time" was just what he wished to avoid, and thirdly, the reference to Fienne.

"You mistake me," he quickly replied, smothering his irritation, "I do not come as the mouthpiece of Mr. Fienne; far from it; he does not even know of my visit to you. Do not let us proceed upon a false understanding. It is true, as you observe, that a struggle without a chance of success on your part cannot affect his prospects of the seat; but you will surely credit him with a disinclination to make an enemy of a relation?"

"Pardon me, Mr. Maynard," said George, stiffly, warming up in the fence with this adroit opponent; "when you talk of my chances of success, you speak as if the future course of events were known to you; I must really ask you to allow that I am as good a judge as yourself of the expediency or hopelessness of a contest,—the origin and the cause of which, so far as relates to my own part in it, is another matter; and, as regards Mr. Fienne being disinclined to make an enemy of me, I do not see the slightest ground for using such an expression; moreover, since you have just declared that you do not come as his mouthpiece, I think the terms of relationship be-

tween us may safely be left to the consideration of himself and me."

"I am sorry if I have offended you," said the lawyer, leaning forward and lowering his voice. "I assure you I had not the remotest intention of so doing."

A faint contemptuous smile played for a moment about the corners of Berthon's mouth.

"Don't imagine it for a moment," he returned, throwing himself back in his chair, and carelessly stroking his moustache. "We seem, Mr. Maynard, to have disposed then of certain preliminaries. With your permission, let us come to the point of your business with me. You spoke of advice and assistance to me; you have kindly given me your opinion upon the probable course of events; though certainly unflattering to me," he added, laughing. "I dare say it is the result of a careful survey of the ground, and I congratulate my honourable opponent upon having so able and satisfactory a critic as yourself on his side,—but," (more gravely) "I shall be glad to hear what advice you have to give me,—and, certainly, I shall feel grateful for any assistance."

His visitor looked hard at him, and the quick contraction of his shaggy eyebrows probably evinced that the polite sarcasm of the other had been understood. He coughed constrainedly, and replied with forced coolness.

"My advice to you is to retire from the contest, and my assistance you are welcome to, to enable you to retreat with dignity from a false position."

The full-blooded veins swelled upon Berthon's forehead, and his voice shook a little, as he said, rising

from his chair, and with ironical emphasis on every word,—

“I am much obliged to you for your communication, Mr. Maynard. I don’t know which I admire most—the overpowering sense of friendship which brought you here, or the political sagacity which prompted Mr. Fienne’s committee,—to whom I will thank you to convey my sense of the impertinence of their message,—to take advantage of our pseudo-connection.”

It might naturally be supposed that Mr. Maynard was prepared for the consequence of his own words, but there was something in Berthon’s manner that took him by surprise ; he too rose from his seat, and was preparing to speak, when George interrupted him in the same sarcastic tone, with—

“Your sense of the falseness of my position, Sir, is sufficiently intelligible to me ; but it surprises me that you should consider it necessary to anticipate the compliments of the hustings so far as to come to my own house to inform me of your opinion ;—and in offering me your assistance ‘to retire with dignity,’ as you are pleased to express it,” he added, in a voice trembling with anger. “I presume you have not considered the insult you imply?”

“Good heavens, George!” exclaimed his visitor, calling him by his name for the first time ; “you utterly misunderstand me, I assure you ; let me explain.”

There was some need of explanation, to say the least of it ; and the lawyer had got himself into a decidedly embarrassing situation ; but fifty years of a hard worldly experience, and a head plentifully sprinkled with iron-grey, have an immense advantage

in conversation over the fire and force of impetuous youth, and John Maynard knew this when he advanced to where Berthon stood, and continued, with assumed familiarity—

“I was wrong to use such expressions towards you, but I have no doubt we shall understand each other perfectly before we part.”

“Probably we shall,” said Berthon, curtly.

“Well,” continued Mr. Maynard, “this is how it stands. A borough is vacant which has been represented for generations by one family. You and I may have our own ideas upon this species of monopoly, but we cannot alter the case. Fienne is a clever man, and an advanced Liberal; he represents a considerable majority here, and expected no opposition. True, he was late in the field, and a section invited you to come forward. I believe perfectly that you could not be certain whether even Fienne would stand, and naturally accepted such an opening to an honourable ambition. Partly as an old friend of the family, and partly as a representative of our party, I came down to assist Maurice. I assure you, that when I first heard of your name as a likely candidate, I was as much gratified at your pluck, and the social standing I presume you occupied down here, to enable you to take the field, as I was grieved to look upon you as an opponent, and indeed I came down with a fixed determination to make a more satisfactory settlement, if possible, of the matter than a pitched battle between you and your cousin.” Here he recovered his equanimity so far, that his face resumed its confident expression, and he went on, with a friendly smile, to George, who stood with his hands behind him at the fireplace, looking as impassive as stone. “Now then,

what can be done? I have seen your address—and a capital one it is—and I am certain that your sympathies are not with the party who claim you. My dear fellow, I could not let you run your head against a stone wall without warning you. Your career should be in another direction; with *us* you may indulge your independent sentiments to any extent; with *them*, they will be fatal to you. I know the numbers down here, and I know the resources on either side. You cannot win: why run the risk? You will be claimed by a political sect, who will seek to bind you hand and foot. You do not represent them any more than Fienne does—any more than I do. Give up the fight—I can furnish you with a hundred plausible pretexts—and I will get you in—guarantee it, influence and money,—upon one of a score of vacancies elsewhere, and on independent principles. What say you?"

Berthon was silent; he might well be. Here was a proposition, his decision upon which might influence his whole future life.

"Don't give me an answer," continued Mr. Maynard, persuasively. "Think over it, and we can meet again. Meanwhile, I will think of a plan for your 'retiring with dignity,'" he said, laughing.

Had he not been confident of the effect of his proposal, he would probably have omitted the last allusion. George looked up suddenly, and said, in slow, decided tones.

"Your proposition is now intelligible, at all events. You have worked it out with care; it does you credit, Mr. Maynard. I require no time for the reflection you suggest; that time is over. Do you suppose, Sir," and he looked the lawyer in the face with a proud, stern

gaze, which made that individual step back a pace as he spoke, "that I formed my political opinions at an hour's notice, so that I can change them at your bidding? Do you imagine, Mr. Maynard, that I entered upon my present course without a full understanding of its probabilities, and my own readiness to meet them, that at the suggestion of a base self-interest I can throw over friends, break my sacred word, and surrender my principles? Upon my soul, Sir, I am astounded to think that you could presume to address such a proposition as this to me!"

"As you like," said the other, with a cold, cynical smile. "You refuse then what I offer?"

"I do," said Berthon, sternly. "and I think our interview had better end."

There was a determination on the younger man's face which forbade any hope on the part of John Maynard of making him reconsider his words. He gave up the game, and said, carelessly—

"Well, do as you wish about it. I have done what I could for you. You throw over your friends with a vengeance, Mr. Berthon, and your chances of success elsewhere. I should have thought the cloud upon your life dark enough already, without Mr. Landon backing you up in this."

"Come," said George, as his visitor took up his hat and stick, "we do not part thus, Mr. Maynard. You speak of a cloud upon my life? Explain yourself, Sir, and oblige me by leaving out any reference to my uncle's name."

"Your *uncle*?" replied Maynard, scornfully, and then, as if recollecting himself, he proceeded. "You refuse my confidence, and spurn my advice; you cannot be surprised if I decline explanations. I will

merely tell you that Mr. Landon is fooling you, and that in refusing to make a friend of me, you are cutting from underneath your feet the only ground upon which you can hope to stand in the future."

"Do you presume to threaten me?" asked Berthon, choking with mortification. "You have stayed too long in my house, Mr. Maynard; do you wish me to request your leaving it?—In slandering Mr. Landon, Sir, you reflect upon yourself—and while *I* live, I will allow no man to insult behind his back the best and only friend I have had in my life. Mr. Maynard, you may make what political capital you like out of this unfortunate visit, but I forbid you to mention his name again in my presence, and as an answer to your proposals regarding the election, you may acquaint Mr. Fienne that I am determined upon fighting it to the end."

Mr. Maynard looked keenly at the speaker, and then said with slow drawn breath—

"At your peril."

"You may reserve your mock-heroics for the hustings," replied George, with bitter irony.

A savage gleam lit up the dark grey eyes, but Maynard seemed to control himself with an effort.

"I have the honour of wishing you good morning," he answered, turning towards the door.

Turning in the hall, he said coolly. "I am sorry for what has happened, Berthon; but if you reconsider your determination, a letter will find me at Fienne House."

"And if you desire to apologise for insinuating that I am a political mountebank, a letter will find me here," returned George, biting his moustache with ill-concealed irritation.

Maynard was on the point of answering "that when he changed his opinion on that score he would do so," but he reflected upon the impolicy of leaving that house in such a mood ; so he pocketed the shaft and said with an icy smile, holding out his hand,—

"I apologise now—most sincerely: let us part friends."

George Berthon took the proffered hand, and as his natural generosity overcame his contempt for his visitor, he added,—

"I accept it Mr. Maynard : we meet at Philippi."

He watched the retreating figure down the path and out of the lodge-gate, and then turned into the house with the heaviest tread and deepest sigh that had ever befallen him. "A cloud upon his life ! What cloud ? What could he mean ?"

Ah, *there* was food for thought ; idle as it was anxious. Unscrupulous, he knew, John Maynard might be, but he had not invented *that*.

He passed along the hall, and the open door of the morning-room was opposite to him. He looked in and saw Lilian there, alone. She was not aware of his presence, and stood in the window, with the slant rays of the setting sun streaming on her face and hair, trimming a vase of flowers. Lovely she looked in her splendid youth ; lithe and beauteous her form, and evenly rose and fell the full white bosom beneath its frail transparent covering. A sunny smile was on the girl's face, the smile of quiet happiness. The birds sang in her aviary and her own heart was in tune with them. There was the one being he had loved through life, his own, his very own for ever. George Berthon felt as if they were not wed, and it was the days of her innocence and girlhood at King's Lisle again,

when he had wooed her with his great deep manly love. Now, he stole behind her, and arresting with one hand the arm that hung over the vase, he passed the other gently round her waist and imprinted on her young fair cheek a kiss which might have woken one from the dead.

"My darling!" he said, as she turned a sweet smile upon his face, "you are my sunset cloud, golden and radiant, are you not?"

"What do you mean?" she said, playfully.

"Nothing," he said carelessly. "Hark—I hear wheels upon the drive; they are come home."



CHAPTER V.

Tempus ad quæ consilia non advocatur, nec rata habet.

BACON.

AS Mr. John Maynard wended his way across the fields to Fienne Park his thoughts were not of the pleasantest. He had set out with the fullest confidence in his own wisdom and his power of instilling it into other people's heads, and he had to return with the conviction that there was, at all events, one person in the world upon whom he had signally failed to make the impression, which was to reduce him in his rhetorical toils. Like us all, he had made his calculations without taking into the account what his host would have to say to them. John Maynard was discomfited, and he felt his defeat very heavily. Moreover, he shrewdly suspected that, in spite of his one or two hard lies, Berthon would refuse to believe that

Fiemme himself had nothing to do with the audacious proposals his Mephistophêles had made. "Fool!" muttered the man, beneath his breath, as he quickened his pace beneath the shadows of the great trees, "his wife and her family have bewitched him; ah, when his passion is over, he will have nothing to console him. How *could* I imagine that Landon had not been before me; he *shall* make terms with me, or by——" the rest of the sentence was left unspoken, but down in the depths of that subtle mind a purpose was probably sworn to, as unchangeable as the oath which accompanied it was savage. And one would be tempted to think that John Maynard's was essentially a savage nature; wherever in him the hidden springs of tenderness or charity might be, he took good care not to expose his weaknesses to the cynicism of a world he hated. And this man had married a Landon! But that event and its accompaniments was far away in the history of the years.

Evening fell; the copses were hushed, save when wakeful wings rustled in the thick leaves. The large autumn moon was heralding her rising by a prophetic gleam from behind the southern hills. Beautiful night, how tender is thy coming!—like the bashful shade upon the damask cheek, the rising light in the fringed eyes—of her who trembles at the confession of love.

Far be it from me to insult the member for Crowdingham by insinuating that any such thoughts passed through his mind as he turned upon a gentle eminence and surveyed the country round him before entering the last gate before the house.

"He should let the lower fields for building," he remarked thoughtfully, "and sell the timber."

There were very few lights along the front of Lord

Fienne's residence ; there was a lamp burning at the hall door, and now and then the fitful glimmer of a candle across the upper windows. Twilight reigned without, silence and darkness within. They dined very late, and when Mr. Maynard entered, the dressing-bell had gone some time. It seemed to him an age since he left St. Cecily's, and he was, perhaps, not even aware that in his anxious reveries he had wandered a long way round.

Maurice Fienne walked moodily up and down the empty drawing-room. The house was infernally slow ;—confound the election and everything connected with it !—John Maynard most of all !—would to heaven he had been born and bred a Conservative, and had some respectable friends, like that lucky dog Berthon ; who could be solitary or unhappy with a wife like Lady Lilian ? this life is vile !

His dark flashing eyes remained fixed upon the carpet, and he paced up and down to the tune of imaginary funeral marches.

It was the last night of solitude anyhow, for after to-morrow the arrival of a host of visitors was to begin ; for his part he hated them all ; there was not he could swear, a decent girl among them. How *could* one live without decent girls ?

The party that was to sit down to dinner that evening consisted of but five persons : Lord Fienne and his son, Madame la Quentin, the widow of a French refugee of high estate and unexceptionable aristocratic prejudices, Catherine, the dark-eyed Catholic child of the deceased Lady Fienne, and the honourable member for C. Under favourable circumstances five people ought to be able to entertain each other, but from some cause or other, the personages I have just enumerated

did not possess that indefinable mutual sympathy which alone can make out of the best materials a cheerful dinner party. The old gentleman was excessively silent, frail on his legs, and afraid of his dishes,—but the pink of courtesy to Madame la Quentin, and the most considerate of hosts to his one guest ; for Madame lived there always, and was Catherine's single companion. Maurice, we know, found nothing particular in existence to make him free and easy : on the contrary, he tolerated his sister because she was silent like himself, and a perfect lady ; he was civil to Madame because she never bored him, and admired him immensely ; he rarely talked with his father, and looked upon him much in the same light as he regarded the portraits of his ancestors in the galleries upstairs ; he felt bound to like John Maynard, and withal cordially detested him, because he did not consider him a gentleman. There were certain incongruities in all this ; were there not ?

Suddenly Fienne bethought himself that it was Saturday, and his favourite weekly review ought to have arrived from London ; so he went off to look for it. When John Maynard descended from upper regions in the glory of his black pantaloons, clean white shirt front, and another huge black satin necktie, he found one occupant only of the saloon. She was on the other side of the room, and did not notice his entrance. What a graceful creature she was, that refined and stately votary of the Virgin ! Not unlike Marion Delessert in height and figure, and contour of head ; but what a difference in expression ! A Greek profile and exquisitely pencilled brows and mouth ; nothing voluptuous about her ; clad in delicate robe of black, relieved by violet here and there ; a pearl

tiara in her raven tresses, and a large golden cross suspended round her shining white neck. It was impossible for mortal man not to admire her, as she stood, with one fair arm leaning upon the mantel-piece, reading, and one foot raised on the velvet stool—or the only one of the species present would certainly not have done so.

"Have you been out to-day, Miss Fienne?" he asked with conventional pleasantness. She laid down her book, and turned her pensive eyes upon the speaker; there was a mixture of sadness and sweetness in the smile on the delicate lips which recalled to this hard man of the world the "Aurora Raby" of earlier days.

"Yes, Aunt Héloïse and I have been for a walk to the Priory of St. Ivor's; it is only a ruin now, but so picturesque! You know, Mr. Maynard, that our place is called after the name, too; but people generally say Fienne Park; I wish they would call it St. Ivor's—I always have it on my note-paper."

"I will endeavour to remember your wish," said the lawyer, courteously.

"You know why? There were holy wells there—at least, the springs are there now, down in the park; but I don't suppose they are holy now," she added, with a gentle sigh. "I suppose, Mr. Maynard, you have been engaged on more important matters?"

"Yes, I have," he answered, turning aside and grinding his teeth at the recollection—"more important than satisfactory, I am afraid."

"Do you think Maurice sure to get in?"

"Yes, I do. But unfortunately the other side are not generally very scrupulous when a seat in Parliament is at stake."

A look of surprise came into Catherine Fienne's fine eyes.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Maynard, you believe that Mr. Berthon could be capable of anything dishonourable? Impossible!—I have seen him."

The lawyer smiled. "We do not call these practices dishonourable in the same sense as we use the word generally," he said.

"You include, then, yourselves in that 'we?'" she asked, naively.

There was a moment's awkward pause, but John Maynard was saved the trouble of a further piece of sophistry by the entry of Lord Fienne and Aunt Héloïse, and, without waiting for Maurice, the quartette moved towards the dining-room.

His lordship was a small man, and by his appearance—in a blue coat with brass buttons, shoes with bright silver buckles, black silk stockings, and a large cambric frill standing out of his waistcoat like the fin of a brisk perch—certainly justified to some extent the classification his son had assigned him to among the pictures in the gallery. He walked off with his daughter, and Maynard had to support and amuse Madame. Maurice walked into the room, quite unconcerned to find them seated, and took his chair on the other side of his sister with much the same helpless sense of resignation as when one prepares oneself for the purgatorial hour beneath the ingenious handling of a prosy parson on a summer's Sunday afternoon in the country. That eternal dinner!

John Maynard did not mind it; he found Madame usually entertaining; the dinner was good, the wine of the best, and his lordship was too much occupied with the inner man and his attendant to interfere with

his monopoly of the ladies. Slowly the soup gave place to the fish, and the entrées made way for the joint, and the game in its turn for the confectionery. Maurice damned all tarts indiscriminately, and he did not recognise any social distinction between an apple dumpling and the most delicate concoction of cream and noyau, in this respect.

When the ladies rose, Lord Fienne followed them—not to the drawing-room, but to a private sanctum, where he could slumber an innocent hour before coffee. So Maynard and Maurice were left alone.

The silence in the room was unbroken for some minutes. The M.P. sipped his '47 port complacently, and wondered "how the devil" the dark mahogany table had ever been converted into such a marvellous looking-glass as it was. Then he admired the handsome oak ceiling and wainscoting, and, despite his democratic creed, thought how well this Titian and that Correggio would look in his own dining-room at home. Maurice broke in upon his reverie with,

"Well, Maynard, how did you get on this afternoon?"

"I have put off unpleasant news," he said in reply; "but you may as well know it now; he declined altogether to listen to me, and treated me much in the same way as he would a stray cur got into his garden." John Maynard laughed as if it were a good joke.

Fienne's brow contracted.

"I cannot imagine what induced you to go to him," he said, crushing a walnut to atoms; "what arguments could you possibly use to him?"

"I pointed out to him my consideration for his welfare," replied Maynard, sneeringly—"the hopeless-

ness of the contest" (Fienne looked at the speaker inquiringly), "and I exposed to his face the real meaning of his own political opinions—if, indeed, the boy has any—and offered him better terms than the Blues will give him."

"What terms?"

"Another vacancy, when it occurs," answered the member, laughing again.

"He refused, of course?"

"Yes, and treated me as cavalierly as if I were a deputation—confound his impudence!"

"I am not surprised," replied Fienne, coldly; "he is too much of a gentleman for us."

Maynard stared at his host, but he could make nothing of the dark moustached countenance beside him and the sarcastic lines round the hard mouth.

"I thought him anything but—" he said; "he is a fool in his own conceit, and has thrown away the best chance he will ever have in his life."

"Of what?"

"Of place and power."

"Of mingled hypocrisy and anxiety you mean," retorted Maurice, who seemed to be drifting into a most unaccountable ill-temper.

Maynard did not exactly know what to make of him, and kept silence.

"Let us drop the election and all about it for to-night," observed Fienne, after a space. "We shall have enough of it to-morrow and after; I won't forgive Berthon for fighting, but I could not wish for a more honourable opponent."

Mr. Maynard loosened the uppermost button of his expansive waistcoat, and continued to drum lightly upon the table with his silver knife.

"How is Miss Maynard?" said Maurice suddenly.

"Very well, thank you: she and my daughter Flora are with an aunt at St. Leonards. Your sister has most kindly invited her here for a week; you are aware of that?"

"No; I was not; but I am extremely glad to hear it. When will she come?"

"Monday, or the next day, I should think. Who are your friends arriving next week?" asked Maynard.

"Sir Thomas and Lady Bryan, Father Matthew, Cranburn, Lady Montrésor, and that incomparable daughter of hers, whom my father wants me to marry."

"Montrésor—I knew a fellow of that name once."

"His name was Robinson," observed Fienne, "and he made a fortune in Liverpool, married Miss M., changed his name, and was knighted for stuffing some foreign prince with turtle and truffles at a city banquet."

"Is he vulgar?"

"Not now; he was. He died two years ago, leaving £200,000, a happy widow, and this wonder. She is a lady—of a certain kind—but still passable, and her daughter is the regulation beauty, pink and white, with a five guinea chignon of a new colour."

Maynard glanced at the speaker; but he seemed quite in earnest.

"I would as soon marry Madame," he continued, filling his own glass with Moselle and passing the port to his guest; "sooner, I think. They plagued us with invitations all the season to Brook Street, so Kate thinks she ought to have them here for a few days—a great deal too conscientious, I think; but we shall have more next week, so it does not matter

much. By the bye to-morrow is Sunday ; I forgot that we shall be alone another day. I say, did you see Lilian Berthon this afternoon ?" he added, turning the conversation again.

"Not a soul but himself."

"Beautiful woman, I think ; I look at her in church, and wonder whether that fellow treats her well."

"Courtship to marriage is purgatory to hell," remarked his companion, bluntly.

"You think so, do you ?" said Maurice, laughing. "Well, well, don't give me your gloomy reminiscences, old fellow ; I want a little more delusion before I arrive at—"

"The truth," suggested the lawyer.

"If you like it. One sometimes thinks women were invented to drive men mad—the woman that is a devil only in another sense than the woman who is a saint."

"A cheerful idea, certainly. Miss Fienne is a saint, I suppose."

"She is," said Maurice, decidedly. "I respect Kate because I believe in her to a certain extent. I wonder whether Lilian Berthon is spiritually mad too ; I dare say. How is it that women are religious and we are not ?"

"I think we supply a fair quota considering the difference of the metal," said Maynard, evading the question.

"Ah, it's a strange mystery," he replied, throwing himself back in his chair and looking up at the ceiling ; "how long is it to last, I wonder !" He referred to the mystery, but Maynard misinterpreted him.

"How long ?" he said, reflectively ; "the day will come, Maurice, when our modern religions will be as

obsolete as the mythologies of the Greeks and Romans."



CHAPTER VI.

*"O what a world of vile ill-favoured faults,
Looks handsome in three hundred pounds a year!"*

MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

IT is great fun being at Haddingford in the winter. A large pond, a quarter of a mile across, lies just without the town, surrounded on two sides by fine trees, and on the other two by the green and the boundaries of the furze heath respectively. Here the north wind sweeps the ice to the smoothness of a mirror, and a continual skating fête with all its picturesqueness and jollity goes on as long as the treacherous beauty of the mirror lasts. When the frost breaks up, and the rain begins, the pond is left to the ducks and geese, and the place is lively no more. In the summer Haddingford is decidedly sleepy—barring the Saturdays that are market days—and highly respectable. Everybody who lives in the High Street draws down his blinds from noon to dusk; and you marvel, as you stroll about among the quaint rickety houses, who are the inhabitants, and where in the world are they? A stray vehicle, the carrier's or the postman's cart, the doctor's trap, or maybe my lord's carriage from Fienne Park, wakes up the whole place with its clatter; for, for some unaccountable reason, the main street is paved like Holborn, only on principles twice as destructive to wheels, springs and beasts; perhaps the corporation prefer a rocky uneven screech-

ing pavement to a macadamized roadway, in order to make up in noise for the smallness of the traffic. There is a large market-place, bristling with a pump, a dilapidated statue of some Anglo-Hanoverian monarch in a pigtail and Wellington boots, and inns of all sizes, shapes, and qualities; a large house, formerly the squire's, now the doctor's, of grey plaster, trailed with ivy, having a quaint garden in front, with white wooden palings, which have made rough acquaintance with the tethered heads of restless bullocks on market-days, occupies two-thirds of one side, and to the right of it is the parish church, hidden very nearly by a high wall and trees in the narrow paved yard round it. The church is worth a visit, and its parson too, a disappointed Oxford man, six foot three, straight and sour in the pulpit, whose discourses, monotoned on Sunday beneath the sounding board, savour strongly of the upper shelves of his library; but if one is to make an acquaintance with Haddingford, and its social and political physiognomy generally, in the space of a short hour or so, the church, with its fine Norman arch and innumerable tablets, and the parson, with his long aristocratic nose and unimpeachable dulness, must wait till Sunday next.

Haddingford had been famous; when and for what, no one now seems able to say. The new town-hall, pseudo gothic and stucco, over against the church, smacks of progress; but altogether, things remain much as they were since the beginning, and no one can reproach the borough for stirring the dust of the times with any new movement or progress anywhere, whether social, ecclesiastical, political, or mercantile.

Coming down from Babylon, in the autumn respite from the galleys, it is refreshing to wander about the

place, noting its odd features, and mentally sketching the lives and characters of the Haddingfordians (dreadful word to write all at once!).

"One seems to be fallen asleep," wrote Harley Grey to a London friend, "and to have woke a hundred years ago, wandering about down here. Though only seventy miles from town, it seems more than that number of years behind, in spite of the railways and the postal facilities for the *Times* and *Le Follet*. Observing this strange difference between great cities and provincial towns of the third and fourth degree, one marvels what is meant by people who speak of the civilization and populating of countries distant thousands of miles from us and Europe, if, at a stone's throw from the great centres of life and movement at home, such a contrast is found between town and town!"

True as those remarks may have been, the London student possibly forgot that when new places spring up, they begin at a point of advancement to which quaint provincial nooks like Haddingford have not yet attained, and never will till the high gabled houses and red tiles disappear.

The pigtailed monarch on horseback had conferred some immense benefit on the town; but whether it was anything more than the shining of his royal countenance there for a few hours on his way to some dissipated favourite's shooting box, and the universal drunkenness and lewd revelling of his postillions in the market-place during the brief hours of some summer night, it was difficult to decipher from the dog-Latin inscription on the pedestal of the stained and railed-in work of art before spoken of.

But 1832 had come since then, and folks even in

Haddingford thought somewhat less of royal obesities, and more of their own rights and stomachs. Alas, for the too confident calculations of a stranger, seeking peace in the paved solitudes of that deceitful borough! A borough? what does that mean, but periodical storms, and social earthquakes? Haddingford returned one Member to represent its high and important interests in the Imperial Legislature: and lo! the time was at hand—dear to the professional agitator, and loathed of the philosophic mind, if any such was to be found in the vicinity of the market-place, and High Street—when the vacancy in that august office was to be filled up. Not a general election, but an accidental one, when the Haddingfordians knew that the eyes of the world would be upon them; and moreover, a *contested* one!

“However has any one dared to fight the nominee of the People!” exclaimed Mr. Adolphus Spriggs, standing under the shelter of his own roof-tree, resplendent in a striped yellow waistcoat, velveteens, and high white hat. It was market-day, and the parlour-door of “The Eagle,” of which paying investment Mr. Spriggs was sole licensed proprietor, was crowded by an admiring, noisy, and thirsty crowd. “Let us drink, my boys, eternal confusion to the thundering aristocrat as seeks to interfere with the freedom of election in this ancient borough!” and much more to the same “almighty” purpose did that same owner of the stripes and velveteens deliver himself of within the hour. The thundering aristocrat referred to, was George Berthon, Esquire, and the nominee of “the People,” viz., Mr. Adolphus Spriggs and his thirsty crew, was of course the Hon. Maurice Fienne, heir apparent of the traditional *owners* of that free,

and independent, and ancient borough ; while the freedom of election, so disgracefully sought to be interfered with, was the packed majority so dear to Mr. Sprigg's American reminiscences and predilections.

"Much cry and little wool," muttered Bob Smythe, as he elbowed his way down the street, in the very worst of tempers with everything in the universe but his old saws.

There are loud cheers in the market-place, and a vociferous unwashed crowd gather round the low-hung wooden-plastered balcony of "The Holly Wreath," "a neutral pub," as Mr. Wittithorne explained to Lord Lisle, who incog., was reconnoitering the situation. The gentleman in the check neckcloth, and open waistcoat, is a great magnate down here, and no one knows what he is going to say, or what side he—some ill-natured busy-bodies say, his wife—will eventually espouse. Allow me to introduce you to Samuel Prideling, Esquire, of the Villa Dante, Haddingford, J.P. This gentlemen is a retired contractor, and has made a great fortune, people say—

"Seeing his gew-gaw castle shine."

He seems to be long-winded and studiously ambiguous, as he shouts of economy and labour and progress, &c., &c., and, as the crowd thickens, and the day is hot, we do not care to remain within ear-shot.

Here it is, a quarter of a mile from the town, half way up the first hill, buried in

"Perky larches and pine,
. . . pricking a cockney ear."

This is the house, the elegant villa where Mrs. Prideling strives so creditably to expend the thousands

which her husband so laboriously, and—before he became a great man—so sensibly worked for. Mr. Prideling no doubt valued his wife, as all good men should, but he found that the luxury had become, by some mysterious process, very much more expensive of late years. That she was a wonderful woman no one would venture to deny, who had ever turned over the contents of the gilt and porcelain card-plate in the gilt and silken drawing-room. By what magnetic process Lady X——, and Sir Jacob Y—— (*inter alia*) were conveyed within the precincts of the Villa Dante, must baffle the comprehension of all who do not happen to be initiated into the secrets of that art of which Theresa Prideling was so remarkable a proficient. Success spurns its ladder, and Mrs. P. was quite content to let those cavil who could not hope to become rivals. She was not the common type of successful vulgarity; far from it; she was an agreeable, accomplished woman, and so handsome at nine-and-thirty, that her daughters, of whom she had three, were often taken for her younger sisters. It took you a long time to get acquainted with all Mrs. Prideling's talents, under the most favourable conditions. You would not believe at first that she was eloquent upon Woman's Rights, though she took such good care of her own. Samuel Prideling the younger, called by his fond relations Vivian, was one of the choice spirits known to the circle of Lawrence Grey, Esq., Harley's brother; but both he and his family were complete strangers to the latter.

Now there dwelt at Haddingford a sister of Mrs. Prideling, Jane Hesketh by name, a widow. This lady had married one who had less chance in the race of life than the hard-working contractor; but who,

while he lived, had possibly also less difficulty in making himself at home in polite society. Poor Captain Hesketh died at an early age, of fever, in the West Indies, leaving a widow and three children. Army men do not often die wealthy ; at least, not those who die in uniform ; and Arthur Hesketh was no exception to the rule. An officer's pension, and a few pounds a year from her father's executors, was all Mrs. Hesketh had to live upon and to educate her children with. But her sister had married a rich man, who was kind-hearted, and fond of *her*, so what did it matter ? Nothing to him, at least not the yearly allowance he made her out of his ample fortune—nothing to us, but a great deal to Jane Hesketh. It is so pleasant to receive money from those who look down upon you as a social inferior ! But Samuel Prideling did not look down upon his sister-in-law ; perhaps he liked her too much ; but if he did, he never told anybody so, or gave his wife reason to suspect it. Nor did she suspect it in all probability, and in her sweet bland moods the rich sister was touchingly sweet and kind to the poor one ; but it is a very difficult thing for a woman, particularly if she be weak and silly, like poor Jane Hesketh, with too much affection and too little sense in her composition, to understand how a poor relation is an obstacle to ambitious women, like Mrs. Prideling, in their social progress. She was that obstacle, and Mrs. P. was very much ashamed of her sister-in-law and her house, and very jealous of her children ; quite naturally and Christian-like too, seeing they were handsomer and cleverer than her own. But the world made no remarks ; society—a sneaking, cowardly thing—was far too enamoured of the luxurious fare at the Villa

Dante to ask after Mrs. Prideling's relations, or question her right to snub them in public, and make it up behind the scenes. Excellent Theresa! how touching were those pink notes beginning: "My darling Jane, it is an age since I have seen you!" How clever those comfits, in which were administered the private family pill!

"There are snobs and snobs, you must know," remarked Fienne to John Maynard, speaking of the Pridelings, "and Mrs. P. is a most polished and delectable snob, pretty to look at, and pleasant to taste; damnable to live with, I should think, though."

If we could only hear the sweet things that are said of us, *sub rosa*, by the people who relished our iced creams and strawberries so much at five o'clock, and paid us such compliments between the mouthfuls—said in confidence an hour afterwards—how long should we walk through life blindfolded?

Merciful interposition, so appreciated by Sam Weller, when in an analogous case he blessed the eyesight which failed to pierce a staircase, and a couple of brick walls.

If Haddingford society ever woke up from its sleepy respectability, it had to thank Mrs. Prideling. Her croquet parties, once a week, were an institution, as invaluable to the town as its Exchange or Cottage-Hospital. *There* alone could one hope to peep through the golden gates into *really* fashionable bliss. And now that all the great houses round were being filled with guests, and the excitement of the Election stirring up everybody, Mrs. P. spread her nets with care, and angled with consummate adroitness. Such flowers, such fruit, such small-talk, such opportunities! He or she would be a born fool to neglect them.

And accordingly the Haddingford folk remained true to their instincts, and when the calf was stuck up, danced with delight to the piping of Mrs. Prideling.

Now, it has been darkly hinted that Theresa was political; moreover she was conscientious, and it baffled for a time her busy brain, as to which Cause she should espouse. On the one hand there were the Fiennes—her own envy, and her husband's predilection. But these new comers? Before her prophetic vision she already beheld the saloons of Earl Celadon's mansion in Grosvenor Square. Mr. Prideling was a landowner of some extent and influence, and he could unquestionably affect the result of the election considerably, if he chose to exert himself; and being of a good-natured disposition, with no political crotchets, and unbounded faith in his wife's capacities—perhaps the best thing that can remain after the delusion of love has exploded—he virtually surrendered that influence into her hands. Both sides know this pretty well, and a sharp game ensued, the prize for which was no mean number of votes, and a good round cheque to be placed to the Working Committee account of whichever side obtained the gracious favour of the presiding deity and genius of the Villa Dante.

Was ever town so blessed as Haddingford, or woman so exalted as Theresa Prideling?



CHAPTER VII.

*"What a strange thing is man, and what a stranger
Is Woman ! What a whirlwind in her head,
And what a whirlpool full of depth and danger
Is all the rest about her ! Whether wed,
Or widow, maid or mother, she can change her
Mind like the wind : whatever she had said
Or done is light to what she'll say or do ;
The oldest thing on record, and yet new !"*

DON JUAN.

LILIAN was alone in the same little room on the ground floor, dear to her from the fact of its being the one corner of the house where she could do exactly as she liked, and which she could keep in glorious disorder without any interference whatever from George. The room was redolent with the perfume of flowers, strewn with the contents of work-baskets, and sociable with open writing-portfolios, brilliant hued *couvre-pieds* in course of cunning construction by absent fair fingers, and lady Nora's crayon drawings. From a glance at the drawing-table, however, it was evident that the greater proportion of the hour nominally given to the Madonna-head had been appropriated by the little pen and ink sketches in which Nora was in the habit of caricaturing everybody and everything in the place. It was well that conventional visitors at St. Cecily's were never shown into Lilian's pretty sanctum.

It was early in the afternoon ; very sunny and inviting outside. George had gone into Haddingford on election business ; Nora and Eustace and Harley Grey were out riding ; Miss Delessert had retired,

after her fashion, to her bed-room to write letters, and so Lilian was alone. She was reading to herself a long affectionate letter from her mother at Kings Lisle telling her how enchanting the old place was, and how they missed their darling; many kind messages to George, and injunctions to Eustace and Nora to come home soon. Then the little woman fell into a reverie, and was woken from it by the sound of carriage wheels outside. The servant announced the arrival of Mrs. Greystone.

Lilian ran to the door to see the ponies before they were led round to the stables: Mrs. Greystone drove the most bewitching of phaetons.

The visitor, a middle-aged handsome woman, gorgeously attired in pink silk and white-lace shawl, embraced her affectionately, and was led away to the drawing-room. Mrs. Greystone lived five miles away, at Liston, and called herself a farmer's wife, because her husband, a retired colonel in the army, fortunate enough to have a fortune to retire upon, amused himself with improving the breed of pigs and cochin fowls. They had one son, Captain Greystone, a young man who, being born with a silver spoon in his mouth did not see the philosophy of hoarding cash, and who led a tolerably happy existence within the triangle of Liston, the Guard's Club in Town, and the watering place which his fond parents chose as most salubrious for the winter months. He had made friends with Berthon, and was so far interested in 'this election row,' that he had gone into Haddingford that afternoon to see how it was going on, and was intending to come over to St. Cecily's for dinner, and to drive his mother back to Liston in the evening.

"And now, my dear child," said that lady, having

disposed herself gracefully in one of Lilian's pretty chintz arm-chairs, "tell me all about your affairs, and what on earth you are going to do with yourself while this odious election is going on. The Colonel and I both want you to come over to Liston till it is all settled; I can't bear the idea of your being mixed up with all these vulgar Haddingford people! Your husband will be besieged by them for the next ten days. Do you think he will let you come?"

"You are very kind, but I am quite sure he would not," she replies, laughing, and thinking her visitor to be joking.

"Nonsense—not let you!" says Mrs. Greystone. "I have no idea of young men making slaves of their wives in this manner."

"I would not go if he would," Lilian continued. "who ever heard of such a thing as a woman deserting her husband at such a time!"

"Well, well," returned Mrs. G. complacently, "that is all very nice of you, of course; only, I am afraid men do not appreciate these sacrifices on our part. Here comes your friend Miss Delessert—what a sweet, graceful child it is!" and she rose and greeted the young lady as if she had known her all her life,— "and how is Sir Hugh, and your mother, Lady Delessert, charming woman—quite well I hope?"

Marion suffered herself to be exhaustively but kindly examined by her indefatigable interrogator for the space of ten minutes, and then Mrs. Greystone turned again to Lilian.

"What do you think has happened, my dear? that odious woman, Miss Prideling, has sent us a card for her garden fête the day after to-morrow: fancy her impertinence in fishing for Bertie! I am really half

afraid he will go ; he says vulgar people are such fun—dreadful boy !”

“ We have had one, too—it arrived two days ago,” said Lilian, with an amused smile, going to the card-tray to find it, “ do you know I have actually forgotten to tell George, to ask him what to do.”

“ Ask George !” exclaimed Mrs. Greystone, holding up her hands in unfeigned amazement.

“ Do you mean to say,—you are thinking of going, child ?”

“ Why,—no ; I don’t suppose we shall. I dislike her very much, what I have seen of her, and I don’t think George cares about it, except that in case——”

“ In case what, Lilian ?” asked Marion, looking very grave.

“ Why,—he might think it necessary to go on account of the election,” she continues, hesitatingly, while a slight colour rose in her fair cheek.

“ Good gracious, child, what nonsense !” Mrs. Greystone observed, “ it is impossible, my dear, that he would allow you to go to these people. You will have Mrs. Prideling calling upon you in Town !” and the idea of this last calamity seemed to paralyze her imagination. “ You have no idea,” she went on “ what sort of people you meet there ; if I thought George wanted you to go, I should quite change my opinion of him ; these horrible elections rub off all a man’s refinement, and make him dreadfully selfish !”

Mrs. Greystone sighed, and gently unscrewed the turquoise top of her double scent-bottle.

Afterwards, when her visitor was re-arranging her delicate toilette in Lilian’s room upstairs, the latter found herself left alone for a few minutes with Marion.

“ I should not think about it, darling,” said Miss

Delessert, "you may depend upon it, George will let you do whatever you like. I should write and refuse this afternoon, if I were you."

"I know it is very foolish," Lilian answered slowly, "but I never do anything without consulting him."

"You spoil him dreadfully," Marion replied, smiling.

"Do I?—I do not think I do too much, dearest. However, I promise you, I will not go to this dreadful fête, for your sakes. How George will laugh at our discussion!"

Mrs. Greystone was a fascinating little woman, and her conversation, always lively, never flagged. She amused Lilian with reproducing sayings and doings of Mrs. Prideling's and her other neighbours, so exquisitely ludicrous, that she began seriously to think that they must be very vulgar or very eccentric, and to be grateful to her for her disinterested warnings of the social horrors she, Mrs. Greystone, had so successfully routed. That lady made herself completely at home in George Berthon's pretty house, and made up her mind, in the course of the afternoon, to protect his aristocratic little wife—for the sake of his connections if not for his own—against the evils to come. "Poor child!" she pityingly observed to herself, when Lilian ran away down the garden path to get a peach for her ladyship, "she knows so little of the world—and men are such clumsy thoughtless creatures in these matters: and yet, how handsome he is!—well, he will require the more management."

And then 'the poor child' came back, and the two went laughing away together on their ramble.

It was nearing sun-down, and Marion Delessert had finished her letters, and gone into the greenhouse to pick a flower for her hair to wear at dinner. When

she got there she forgot her mission, and sat down on one of the benches, and began to think. She was fond of long reveries. "There is something religious about a reverie," she said once. "I think quiet contemplation quite sweet." And so she fixed her pensive dream-like eyes on the drooping glories of the fuchsias round her, and glided away on her imaginative ocean. And it seemed to her as if she had been in that house a long time—which was not true—and that it was the most delightful place in the world—which might be. Why was it so delightful? Was it for its flowers, its music, its sweet women, its freshness and youth, or its *religion*? She thought not altogether so: it was for its *men*. Alas! poor Marion thought herself so wrapt up in her endeavour to be a saint, graceful and guileless, that it was not possible for her to fall in with ordinary human ideas about life. Now she was forced inwardly to confess that though George Berthon was very worldly, and very unmerciful in his satire, and very obstinate and selfish, she thought, in his notions, he was certainly fascinating, and seemed to make Lilian most happy:—would *she* ever be as happy? And again, though Lord Lisle so often offended her "finer sense," and was rough—and oh! how worldly, too!—yet he was very kind to women and very amusing; and then—cruel truth—she knew that Harley Grey did not care for her, and all the while he was the one of the three she liked best, and felt happiest to have as her companion. He was so tender in his manner to her—so thoughtful and seemingly care-worn—might she not know why?—and was he not a poet? There were his poems in the book-case, and she knew so many of them by heart: must he not be like them?—and, if

so, was not his society necessary to her?—not for life, that was absurd, but for a little while longer?

And then she thought how soon they would have to part, and she was sure she should be unhappy when he was gone. Was she worth caring for by anybody? she wondered—and poor Marion hid her face in her lily hands, and one or two large sad tears crept through them, and dropped silently on to the brick floor of the greenhouse.

How long she remained sitting there she did not know, but the sound of voices without recalled her to herself. It was the riders come home. Then she heard a step upon the garden-walk; the door of the greenhouse opened, and, before she had time to flee, who should enter but Mr. Grey.

"You here, alone?" he said, lifting his hat, and with a cheerful ring in his voice, that seemed to bring back the pulsations to her own still heart.

"Is that so very strange a thing?" she replied, blushing, she knew not why.

A momentary silence ensued. It was the most accidental and ordinary rencontre in the world, and yet, for some undefined reason, neither thought so.

"Are you reading to yourself in this pleasant place?" he asked, looking at her slightly swollen eyes, and thinking that she had perhaps been crying over the climax of some novel's agony.

"No; I came here to get a flower for my hair to-night; will you help me to choose it?"

Her self-possession returned with the smile upon her face, as she spoke.

"I shall be most happy; but I am afraid I am no judge," he said.

If you cannot make pretty speeches off-hand, it

seems very easy to say common-place ones; but sometimes it is difficult to talk at all. Harley did not feel in the least sentimental towards Miss Delessert; yet, with that quick lightning-like intention, which made him so sensitive to pleasure or pain, he felt that the fair girl with whom he found himself so unexpectedly alone was embarrassed, and the embarrassment communicated itself to him.

He stood at her side, pointing to this flower and that, and talking in a rambling, incoherent sort of way about their relative suitability to her hair and complexion.

"Will you wear any I choose?"

"Yes, I will."

"Look here; I am very fond of camellias, and this is a beauty; I think red will do better for you than white."

So saying, he cut off the flower, but did not give it to her.

"How are you getting on with your book, Miss Delessert?"

"O, that one you were reading out loud to us?—I am afraid I get on very slowly; I ought to have brought it here, as you suggested, ought I not?"

"You seem very fond of solitude," he said, not heeding her question for the moment. "I thought you would have come out riding with us to-day."

"I had letters to write, or I might have; I don't mind being alone, though." This was said, quite unknown to herself, a little wistfully.

Her head dropped somewhat, and she picked the petals off the great silver and crimson geraniums.

"You could not have a more charming solitude than this, certainly," he observed, looking round. "I

feel much tempted to shirk the next ride too, and come and read here."

"That would never do!" she exclaimed, thinking he of course alluded to herself being there too.

"Why not?"

"What would Lady Nora say if her cavaliers forsook her?"

He laughed; and then he added, so gravely—

"I do not think I was ever missed."

Marion lifted a timid glance to his, but those strange eyes were looking away from her, out through the small panes of glass, against which the jasmines and roses were tapping, moved by the evening wind.

"There is the dressing-bell," she said, starting at the silence that had fallen again. "Mr. Grey, will you give me my camellia?"

"I beg your pardon," he said hastily, handing it to her.

She coloured; murmured "thank you," and glided away.

Harley remained behind for a few minutes, pacing up and down, swinging his riding-whip thoughtfully.

"Strange girl; sweet voice; not quite happy, I think—who is? I wonder whether she is in love with Eustace Celadon. She fascinates me too, in a way; but *that face—that face—who can* she have been?"

When the ladies were assembled in the drawing-room after dinner, that evening, and Mrs. Greystone was entertaining them with more than her usual liveliness, Miss Delessert took it into her head that the stars were better company than the actors in their fair guest's recited domestic comedies, and, pleading to Nora the heat of the room, she sought the evening air. It was a relief to stand outside on the terrace of

turf, which ran the length of the conservatory, and to feel the light breeze fanning one's temples ; the air was laden with the scent of flowers ; were they not all asleep in their darkly-shadowed beds beneath—roses, and carnations, heliotropes, and hyacinths, in their glory ? If we lived to be a hundred, and could but crawl outside the threshold in the evening to see the stars, I think they would strike us as being as lovely and sublime then as when our weak wondering eyesight first saw them in childhood. How tired we grow of man and his vanities ! but Nature never palls. Beneficent Mother, ever receiving her weary children with open arms, when, sick of the toil of life, they return to quench their burning thirst at her ever-springing wells of innocent joy !

Marion stood upon the terrace, and looked out upon the night. The dark belts of trees bound all view beyond the garden : no glaring sights to ache the eye ; no noise to deafen the ear ; everything seemed at peace. The lowing of some distant restless animal, the pipe of some lone bird from the thick shrubberies, or the swift sweep of a bat upon its solitary night-errand, was the only sight or sound ; but no, Mrs. Greyston's gay boisterous laugh came from the drawing-room, and jarred on Marion's thoughts ; she descended the steps and wandered over the lawn. Something white in the dusk startled her ; it was only an urn, full of fern, upon its pedestal, that marked the path through the shrubbery round to the kitchen-garden. She walked noiselessly along it wrapt in her thoughts, till she was startled again, this time by the sound of voices. She stopped and peeped through the bushes ; by the reflected light from the windows of the house, she recognized their faces ; it was Ber-

thon and Harley, who had come out to smoke a cigar before going into tea. They discontinued their walk exactly opposite to her, and then she remembered there was a seat there. Though she had thrown a shawl over her evening dress, she was fearful of attracting their attention by moving; but she felt it impossible to remain, when the words which she overheard riveted her to the spot.

"Perfectly beautiful; I cannot imagine who she was."

"I know the people pretty well about here," said George's voice, "but unless it be Catherine Fienne, I cannot think whom you can have seen: but then she is dark, and you say that your fair unknown had golden hair and violet eyes."

There was a silence, and then Harley said—

"What a strange thing it is that one particular face that we see by chance for a moment, less beautiful perhaps by far than many we have known and been accustomed to for a long time, will make a deeper impression upon the memory than whole weeks and months of intercourse with those others!"

George seemed not to hear the remark, for he puffed vigorously at his weed without replying.

"She was riding alone with a groom," continued Harley, "Lady Nora suggested that she was one of the visitors at Fienne Park."

"Well, my dear fellow, let me hope you will meet her again."

"I have no wish to."

"Nonsense! you cannot help yourself."

"What on earth have I to do with women, one face or another? they are to me but pictures in a gallery,

to criticize, and go away and forget, or try to," he added.

"You who wrote 'the Dream of Youth,' to talk in that strain!" said Berthon, laughing slightly, "my dear boy, you will never become really prosaic and philosophical, until you reach my own stage: married, middle-aged, respectable, and utterly unromantic."

Harley only smiled to himself quietly, but the fair eavesdropper with the beating heart could not see that: she could not stop there a moment; she must run away at all hazards; but wait! he is speaking again.

"I have one wish, one prayer—to succeed in steeling myself against the passion of love. You are happy, George; you have survived it, and live now for nobler things. I know that I should love madly, and make an utter fool of myself, and," he continues in a lower tone, "I positively believe a woman's scorn would kill me."

"Do you mean to say, Harley, you have never been in love?"

"I thank God that I have never seen a woman whose remembrance could trouble my peace."

"You are a lucky dog: what would women do, I wonder, if they knew how completely we worship them!"

"Speak for yourself," said Harley, laughing with a lightness he did not feel, "I find it cold here; shall we go in?"

"How about that face you saw to-day——"

The rest was lost in the distance; they crossed the lawn, threw the ends of their cigars away, two glow-worm lights on the gravel path, and went in.

Marion crept away too, like a guilty thing: the

stars seemed blotted out now, the night cold and dark. Like a foolish sentimental child as she was, she went to bed, and cried herself to sleep.



CHAPTER VIII.

*" . . . Whispering tongues can poison truth ;
And constancy lives in realms above ;
And life is thorny ; and youth is vain ;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness on the brain."*

COLERIDGE.

THE next morning was wet. No storm-clouds, but a dull grey cloak over hill and field, and a warm misty rain drifted like a shroud over the gay parterres of the garden, and the breadths of turf between. The roses drooped, and pearly drops glided over the queen roses' smooth rounded bosom, and fell upon the up-turned faces of the purple pansies, and the golden and white stars beneath : the woolly hollyhocks hung their heads wofully, and gave up the game.

It was about an hour after breakfast, a meal, which at St. Cecily's, was not a Bedouin repast for isolated travellers from upper regions on their way to the employment of the morning, but the most cheerful and sociable meal of the day, when everybody was brightest, and the girls looked their best, and no one was missing.

George Berthon was old-fashioned enough to have family prayers, and if anyone was late—saintly Miss Delessert, detained by her long orisons, for example—they seldom outstepped that margin, and were ready

to come in, like strayed sheep, looking guilty and uncomfortable, when the single file of the servants of that small household passed out after Berthon's final, and awfully stern, "Amen."

An hour after breakfast, the beauty of the table was ruined and the room deserted. In George's study were two individuals, not looking as if they could not amuse or occupy themselves without each other's aid. The gentleman was writing letters, the lady seated in the window on a stool, completely enveloped in the sheets of a large newspaper. I wonder how many people would get married, or, at least, how many would give themselves up with such complete self-satisfaction to the process, if they could dip into the future, just one year ahead? It was not quite a year yet since that morning when George Berthon was made the happiest of men in the sacred gloom of St. George's, Hanover Square. And, if anyone had asked him, he would have asserted with confidence that he was the happiest of men still; but for all that, it is probable that not in the old days at King's Lisle would he have been found separated from his betrothed in the same room by a pile of business letters and yesterday's *Times*. Of course he wrote his letters then, and possibly Lady Lilian read the papers sometimes, but not under the same conditions; and yet why not?

As this is not intended to be a parenthetical chapter treating of celibacy *versus* the temporary insanity of engaged couples *versus* married life, the examination of the different conditions of existence under which George and Lilian now found themselves, must be shelved for a more convenient opportunity.

He scribbled away as if he thought of nothing else

in the world ; but he liked to feel that she was sitting there, although, if he had looked up, he would have seen nothing but a pair of dainty little feet in trimmest shoes, with bright steel buckles and blue bows, peeping from under a pretty *piqué* dress, topped by a big advertisement sheet, and crowned by glossy braids of hair which belonged to a shining little head somewhere.

Lilian had come into the room in the first instance to solve some arithmetical riddle in the household accounts, with George's assistance ; but, when that was disposed of, instead of retiring, she got the newspaper—which, by the bye, she did not want to read a bit—and went into the window where she sits now. Once or twice she peeps over the top of the sheet, and the little face looks troubled ; but he will not look up, and she thinks that he looks more severe than the nature of his occupation warrants. Up one column and down another, wander Lilian's eyes, and she imagines she is reading, but in reality she confounds the Naval and Military Intelligence with the Obituary, and is thinking of "that odious woman's" unanswered invitation, and how she shall tell it to George.

She watches him seal up a note very carefully, strike off some memorandum in his pocket-book, and then push away the heap of letters with a sigh of relief.

"George, I have something to tell you ?"

"Have you, little woman ? what is it ?"

"That odious wo—, I mean Mrs. Prideling, has sent us a card for her garden fête to-morrow."

"I have been wondering why she did not send it before."

A momentary pause, then—

"It is in the drawing-room, shall I fetch it?"

"No; don't trouble; have you answered it?"

"Not yet."

"When did it come?"

"Two days ago."

Not even [the top-knot is visible now; she is metamorphosed into a pair of feet and a newspaper.

"You had better send it this morning," he says.

"You don't want to go, of course?" She dare not look at him. George looks at her surprised, and wonders what is up.

"You cannot read the paper and talk at the same time," he says, after a pause. She throws down the *Times*, and looks at him doubtfully. "Why do you suppose I do not want to go, Lilian? On the contrary, we must go."

She reddened visibly. "Why, George?"

"Because I want that man Prideling's votes, and must be civil to his wife to get them. I wonder you did not tell me before, child; we ought to have written before this."

Lilian bites her nails, and feels that she is getting angry.

"I don't see what they have got to do with each other," she says.

"Unfortunately they have, and I know that Mrs. Prideling is particularly anxious to meet you."

"I wonder you wish me to go, George, dear."

"I have told you why," he answers kindly, looking perplexedly at the down-cast, childish face.

"It seems to me that you sacrifice every consideration for this election." This was the first time she had ever spoken thus to him. A look of surprise and

vexation came into Berthon's face ; he rose from his chair and said—

"What is the matter with you, child ? I don't understand you ?"

She begins to feel unhappy ; but being a woman, of course sticks to her text.

"I don't want to go," she replies quickly ; "none of us do. Mrs. Prideling is a vulgar woman, whom I dislike."

"Where have you met her ?" he asks.

Another fix ; she turns her rings round nervously.

"No where," is the reply.

"Then how do you know she is vulgar ?"

"I have been told so."

"Told so ?" he says, with a laugh. "Why, child, by whom ?"

"He is laughing at me," she says to herself, and feels hurt exceedingly. "Mrs. Greystone," she continues.

She looked at him as she spoke ; one gentle, timid glance, and saw the cloud darken upon his brows.

"And it is by her advice, I suppose, Lilian, that you dislike going ?"

"If you like to say so," she returns, not perceiving his irony.

"Confound that woman's tongue !" he angrily exclaims. "What the devil does she mean by coming here and putting nonsense into your head, Lilian ?"

"No one puts nonsense into my head," she retorts, crimsoning, and feeling greatly wronged by his getting angry.

"She is a vulgar, designing woman—and you wish me to make a friend of her for the chance of a few

miserable votes—I hate the election!” She has covered her face with her hands, and is sobbing.

George is silent ; he joins his hands behind him and paces up and down the carpet moodily ; after a minute’s pause, he stops before her, and says in his old kind voice—

“Lilian, I am sorry that you are vexed about it ; it is not my fault. It is a thousand pities you did not come and tell me before, instead of consulting that silly chattering woman, Mrs. Greystone. I do not see what your grievance is though, little one ; it is a small thing to you, but most important to myself ; you will see it in a moment when I explain it to you.”

But not a word does Lilian say ; though mortified beyond measure with herself, a longing comes into her breast to fling herself in his arms, and beg him to forgive her her foolishness and her tears. But the silence is very awkward, and hesitation brings second thoughts. “He treats me like a child,” she thinks, and she remembered Mrs. Greystone’s warning and her promise to Marion—given so lightly. A little evil spirit whispers her to tell him that he does not love her or else he would not treat her so, but she knows it is a base wicked lie, and that she loves him madly ; but one day’s reflection also suggests that she is in danger of sacrificing her dignity altogether to her devotion to him.

“Lilian, why don’t you speak ?” he says, and his voice grows husky. Then she takes a desperate plunge, and replies, passionately.

“I don’t see why you should use violent language to me !—you know I hate going—and—I think it is very unkind and selfish of you——”

“Stop, Lilian, stop ; for God’s sake stop !” he

exclaims, feeling a sharp agony within, and wrath rising like a sudden storm, "do you mean to say you refuse to go?"

"You think of nothing but the election!" she goes on madly, utterly regardless of consequences, and in words which she would have cut her tongue out rather than have uttered, an hour afterwards—"you leave me all day for these *low* people—and—and (with a great sob) it is cruel of you to force me to make up to them; I won't do it—I won't."

"Won't what?"

"Go!" she exclaims, "besides, I have promised."

"Promised!—promised whom?"

Shall she gratify his curiosity?—no, she will not.

"Promised myself—and I mean to keep it!"

If Lilian could have seen the sharp pain upon her husband's face as she spoke, she would even then have relented, but she felt her heart surging in great bounds, and the room swam round and round. Berthon passed his hand over his forehead, and asked himself whether he was not dreaming. Furious, not with her, so much as with the unknown cause of the sudden cloud which had arisen between him and her, he remembered then how indifferent she had been to his success during the past week; he could not have expected her to take a great interest in the details of a political contest, but he unjustly magnified her seeming callousness, which was really an incapacity to estimate the magnitude of the interests he had at stake, by the light of the present outburst, and feeling that if he made shipwreck of his happiness he would not at all events succumb to Mrs. Greystone's influence and shatter his chances of the election in the same breath, he steeled his heart

against his wife, and said in a voice, at once harsh and authoritative :—

“Lilian—you *shall* go!”

A slight shiver passed over her form, but she remained leaning motionless against the window-shutter, with her face buried in her clasped hands. George sat down at the writing-table, and taking a piece of note-paper, he hurriedly wrote an acceptance of the invitation, sealed it with his own signet-ring, and, rang the bell for the servant.

Lilian had a dim consciousness of what was going on ; at the sound of the bell she dropped her hands, and, looking at him for a moment, with eyes bright in their loveliness with the light of hot and angry tears, as if measuring the magnitude of the step she was about to take, she stepped to the table, and seizing the note, tore it into fragments, and rushed from the room.

Berthon stood amazed, like one mesmerized ; he could not believe what he saw. The servant appeared ; it was Hargreaves ; at his query he recovered himself, and dismissed him with a hurried order for his horse, without the slightest intention of using it. Hargreaves looked from the rain outside to his master’s face and was puzzled ; however he asked no question, and left him.

For a whole hour George remained in his study, wrestling with himself. He had always declared that one single quarrel with her whom he loved so well, would most certainly be sufficient to destroy their mutual confidence ; and he refused to believe that that quarrel had really taken place. Unfortunately, there lay the pieces of the note, as she had thrown them ; proof enough to convince the most sceptical of sophists. He picked them up slowly, one by one, and

put them into the basket. Then he sat down again, and leant his head on his hand. He cursed the fair hostess of Forest Lodge, Liston, in a way, which, if she could have heard it, would not only have frightened that lady out of her five senses, but most probably also have convinced her of the correctness of her estimate of mens' brutality.

He was angry with himself for giving way to his vexation before her. He thought he had spoken too harshly, but at the same time, with manlike obstinacy, was determined not to give way. "I would in a moment, a hundred times over," he said, "but for two considerations: it would play into that mischievous woman's hands, and sacrifice one of the most important points in my canvass. Lilian can not be mad enough to force me to do this: poor child, she was not speaking her own words: confound that woman!"

Then did George feel the truth of those ever memorable lines:

"To be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness on the brain."

Miserable six hours! how slowly they crept away!

Miss Delessert had a violent headache and did not appear at lunch. Nora was sent for by Berthon, who merely told her that he must go into Haddingford, and that he should not be back till dinner-time. Lord Lisle and Harley anathematized the rain, and took to billiards and unlimited cigars. Nora, after a vague attempt to rally Lilian's spirits, began to suspect some "devilry," and thought it best to join the gentlemen at their play, and told Harley she wished he would put on a mackintosh, and go and fetch Bertie Grey-stone from Liston, to amuse her.

And what did Lilian herself do? No human being

could be more utterly miserable. She felt despicable in her own eyes beyond belief, and mentally annihilated Mrs. Greystone and her counsel.

She cried her eyes out, and experienced all the horrors of a separation and divorce already. "How could I have been so wicked?" she exclaimed, poor little thing, lying prone on her bed, in an agony of mortification, shame, and grief. She would rush to him and ask him to forgive her; but alas! he had gone out. She was sure he would get wet through and get bronchitis,—and, O horrible thought!—*he might die!* Though the probability was remote, the possibility seemed to poor Lilian's distorted vision awfully near. Then she went and sat in the window-seat, with her little gold watch in her hand, longing and praying for his return. But it only rained faster and faster, and got darker all round the hills.

"I shall die if he does not come soon!" she said.

But people do not give up the ghost so easily—women particularly; and Lady Lilian might have known, if she had not been so ignorant, that she was only pursuing the orthodox feminine course of first doing her best to break a true lover's heart, and then crying like a child at the success attending the attempt.

In course of time George came home, wet through, but otherwise—the better for his ride. And when Lilian heard his arrival, she felt mortally afraid of facing him, and remained cowering in her window-seat. He went straight to his own room, locked himself in, changed his clothes, and pulled out his watch, and found it was half-past five.

"I will go to the little woman," he said to himself,

"and beg her pardon for speaking roughly to her,—fool that I was. I wonder what she will say now?"

It may be observed that he had made no attempt to re-write the note which his wife had so unexpectedly demolished.

"To stand on one's dignity with her is simply absurd to think of," he said, as he unlocked his door. But at that moment there came a timid knock outside, and when he opened it, a little frightened face, all red with crying, but now wreathed with a doubtful smile, appeared in the passage.

"May I come in?"

"Certainly," he said, flinging the door back. The next moment she was hanging round his neck, twining her arms about him like a frightened child, and hiding her burning face upon his broad chest.

"O George—I was so wicked—will you ever forgive me, darling?"

"I was rough in manner to you this morning, Lilian," he answered gravely, "and I ask your pardon for it; I did not believe for a moment you meant what you said, child, or it would have made me very unhappy."

"I have been so miserable," she murmured, not daring to look at him yet, and clinging closer and closer.

Then he kissed her fondly, and made her raise her eyes to his own.

"Well, Lilian, and what about the——?"

She placed her white hand upon his mouth, and drew from her pocket with the other a little pink folded missive, directed to Mrs. Prideling, Villa Dante, etc. He laughed heartily, and nearly upset her again. By-and-bye she fled away to dress for dinner, feeling

very happy, but more ashamed of her burning cheeks than ever.

So ended George and Lilian's first quarrel. The fair and accomplished owner of the grey ponies might not have been so satisfied with its dénouement.



CHAPTER IX.

*"'Twas never merry world,
Since lowly feigning was called compliment."*

TWELFTH NIGHT.

THE garden fête at the Villa Dante was to be fruitful of great events. Mrs. Prideling's conscience—or what went by that name—began to twinge her. It was indeed a difficult and anxious time: who could tell what would or would not happen? More unlikely things had taken place before now than that the heir to Fienne Park and the peerage—only a barony, as Theresa, after an elaborate comparison, remarked with a sigh—should marry the daughter of a wealthy justice of the peace. Then came recollections more vivid than pleasurable of the tremendous struggles there had been to achieve the distinction of bearing that same royal commission. But anything approaching to a recollection was soon swept away by the contending forces of the present hour. Satisfactory as such a marriage would undoubtedly be in one sense, it was yet quite possible that the old gentleman, who refused to give up the ghost, with his haughty French lady, and her charge, the Hon. Catherine Fienne, might one and all refuse to receive "mamma and her family," even if Maurice took it into

his head to unite himself to one of the daughters. Distant they were already, and cold, in spite of the most astute diplomacy. They kept up no state in Town, and might become a bar rather than an assistance to her, if they ever became related by marriage. But all these were remote contingencies. Should she persuade her husband to help the Fienne faction, and trust to Providence for the issue?

But that other side of the picture! Lord Fienne was nothing and nowhere in comparison with the actual position in the fashionable world of Lord Celadon and his family. They were evidently plain sensible people, or they would never have allowed a daughter of theirs to marry a commoner. And then there was Viscount Lisle: how *distingué* he was! Perhaps—perhaps—here Mrs. Prideling's views became confused, and she fell asleep and dreamt of palaces and tiaras, and a grand alliance for each of her girls; but she woke up on the eventful morning, angry for having seen in her dreams Lord Lisle walking arm in arm with Mary Hesketh, her sister's child.

Those Heskeths, what a nuisance they were! The Villa Dante was about a mile-and-a-half from the modest abode where Mrs. Hesketh lived with her family.

Theresa Prideling, whose husband possessed carriages and horses, found that distance too great for her to traverse more than once at stated periods. Jane, herself, was not unwelcome at the Villa when she chose to walk over. Mr. Prideling, himself, was very fond of his sister-in-law, and carelessly kind to the two girls. Jane was certainly poor, sometimes shabby, but generally lady-like and presentable; Mary and Lizzie did not adore their aunt as much as

that august lady felt to be her due ; girls do not stand being snubbed so easily as their mammas, and Theresa did not scruple to keep them in their place, whenever they attempted to put themselves forward, in other words, to rival their cousins. When within the precincts of their aunt's house, they knew they had to be ever on their "Ps" and "Qs," and Theresa was not the person to forego the advantage, as woman versus woman, which she possessed over her sister, from a quick perception of poor Jane's nervous anxiety to avoid giving offence herself, and to keep her girls from doing so. Both the daughters were pretty, and admired, in spite of the persistency wherewith Mrs. Prideling pooh-poohed their claim to that distinction. "I cannot imagine what people see in them," summed up her opinion on this head. "How will they dress, and how will they behave?" was the momentous query which she addressed to herself, with reference to the Heskeths' appearance at the fête. They must come early and be pulled about in her bedroom before anybody arrived, to make them presentable. Since she *had* to ask them, she composed a flowery note of invitation ; not proceeding on the usually intelligible principle of reducing to a minimum their pleasure in coming, as a set-off against the disagreeable duty of patronizing them, but, more wisely improving upon the necessity of the occasion, to render the obligation as great as possible.

Mrs. Hesketh had a son, Arthur ; this young man was a thorn in the side of Theresa Prideling. He was a high-souled boy, and recalled Captain Hesketh in all his ways. If women are quicker of perception than men, the latter make the balance even in sensitiveness. With the women of the Hesketh family, the

benefits and the attentions of the Pridelings went down easily enough, compared with the manner in which they stuck in the throat of Arthur Hesketh. He frightened his mother out of her wits by declaring that he would stand no slights from any one of his rich relations. Arthur was in a merchant's office in London, and kept himself on a moderate salary. His dream of going into the army soon gave way to the force of circumstances. He worked hard, and stinted himself for the sake of his mother and sisters, to whom he was very much attached. He was political in his way, and took an immense interest in the Haddingford election. He was attached to Berthon's committee, and George knew how to value the sacrifice the young man made of his short holiday in the country. He seldom visited at the Villa Dante, and then for certain reasons only. His natural liking for his good-natured uncle was one of these, not overbalanced by his proud contempt for his aunt, and another most potent reason was, that he was very much in love with his cousin, Florence Prideling. To Jane Hesketh's great surprise and delight, Arthur had announced his intention of including himself for once in the "all of you," whom Mrs. Prideling had invited: "all of you" being the term by which Theresa usually addressed her relatives through the post. It was a great achievement in the art of patronizing, to have invented a term by which her sister Jane could feel, if she chose, her cook and housemaid included.

After the rain of the day before, the weather was glorious; the morning sun dried the grass, and the trim lawns at the Villa Dante received their decoration of croquet hoops.

"I think Lady Lilian Berthon's note quite charm-

ing," remarked Theresa to her husband at breakfast, "I do hope you will make yourself agreeable to her husband and her brother."

That husband was anxious to get Mr. Prideling's influence on his side, and when he perceived how the land lay, he went in with immense gusto for flattering his handsome wife. Mrs. Greystone was quite right in her estimation of the effect of elections on the male animal after all. Lady Lilian's brother's behaviour was not so much to Mrs. Prideling's satisfaction, for Eustace innocently imagined that his attentions to her pretty nieces, would prove as acceptable to her as to her own daughters, and since Lizzie Hesketh was infinitely more amusing than her stiff cousins, he devoted himself to her. She did her best to undeceive him on the first head during the afternoon, but failed to convince him of the incorrectness of his conclusion on the second.

The guests from Fienne Park comprised Maurice Fienne and his sister, John Maynard and his daughter, Miss Evelyn Maynard, Lady Bryan, with Miss Montrésor, and young Mr. Cranburn. Catherine Fienne looked very stately, and thought how much more she would have enjoyed stopping at home; but her brother's interest was uppermost, so she did her best to make herself agreeable with the Misses Pridelings.

Maynard took in the scene at a glance. Among the well-dressed crowd there were about half-a-dozen individuals whom he cared about, to talk to and observe. The Berthons had not yet arrived, and he planned the little campaign of the garden at his leisure. He being a commoner, although an M.P., had to bide his time while the Hon. Maurice and his sister, and the portly wife of Sir Thomas Bryan were

one by one greeted by Mrs. Prideling, and handed over to someone else ; then he came forward.

"Your house and grounds looked so delightful the other day," he said, "that I could not resist the temptation of coming, this afternoon, although I never really go out. Where are your charming daughters, Mrs. Prideling ? Please give me the pleasure of introducing to them my young friends with me."

"You are very kind," she replies, blandly. "It is very good of you to come ; I only hope you will not find it very slow."

"That would be impossible. I trust you will make use of me in any way you like."

Theresa would have been very glad to have monopolized his attentions on any other occasion ; but she was particularly anxious just then not to suggest to the Berthon faction the intimacy which in reality subsisted between Mr. Maynard and herself. Seeing a cloud of blue in the distance, and rightly interpreting it into the arrival of Lady Lilian and her friends, she rapidly passed over her M.P. to a married lady, to whom he proved more acceptable, but less polite, than to herself, sailed across the lawn, and received her distinguished guests with more deference than her plain-spoken husband could quite swallow.

"Confound the woman !" he muttered, when Theresa had been a full half hour wooing the good opinion of George Berthon's wife, Lady Nora Celadon, and Lord Lisle. "She will make Fienne think I mean to cut him."

Thereupon Mr. Samuel Prideling betook himself to Maurice, and endeavoured to prove himself a freer agent in matters terrestrial than he was. Fienne, who hated the whole affair, and thought it infernally

slow, first chatted insipid nonsense to Miss Clara Prideling, then shook off the ex-contractor with a groan of relief, and threw his worldly wisdom to the winds, and annoyed Maynard considerably, by shunting every one else for the society of Lady Nora, who was not sorry to see her cousin, and made infinite fun of everyone, for his benefit.

"I am heartily sick of this game of chess with your brother-in-law," he said to her, as they strolled away through the crowd, "I would give it up to him with pleasure, were it not for the local interest I am supposed to be responsible for. I wonder he cared to set us all by the ears," he continued, rather bitterly.

"You know, you have never made friends with him," Lady Nora replied, "and of course he looks upon you as a stranger, and then you sent your friend, Mr. Maynard, over to insult him."

"I did not send him ; he is no friend of mine. Do you mean to say he actually insulted Berthon ?"

"I inferred so, from what George said ; but something unpleasant happened, or he would not have kept it to himself."

Maurice bit his lip, and was silent.

"You never come over to see Catherine now," he went on, after a pause.

"Why—I was there the other day with Lilian, and you were out ; you always are," she added, maliciously.

"Do you mean to cut me for good after this ?" he asks, gloomily.

Lady Nora laughed.

"How can you be so foolish, Maurice ? Look, here comes one of the Misses Prideling to capture

you. You must let me go, and play your cards with her."

"You are in a precious hurry to get rid of me. Save me from that lump of wax for a few minutes, pray."

"I shall not," she said merrily. "I know what will be the consequences. Mr. Longstopp, how d'ye do?"

She captured the reverend gentleman with a glance, and began flirting outrageously with the most wooden man in Haddingford. Fienne looked despairingly after her, not unobserved of John Maynard, who made his way to him.

"For heaven's sake, Maurice," he whispered, "make up to these people a little more. There is that woman hand-in-glove with the other set, and you will lose Prideling now. She is making up a set of croquet; can you not join it?"

Fienne surrendered himself to his fate, and was led away.

Theresa, who snubbed Maynard, because she was successful with the Berthons, began to offend Lilian, and very much amuse Lady Nora by her familiarity. Her acquaintance with the family peerage-tree grew with the afternoon, and she not only offered to introduce her to some of the county people who had not yet visited at St. Cecily's, but expressed a hope that they would meet in town next season.

"I dare say my brother would be delighted to see your daughters again," Nora said, smiling, as she observed coming towards them, with mallets in their hands, Eustace and Mary Hesketh, whom she mistook for a Miss Prideling. He had smuggled Miss Hesketh into the game after her aunt had made up the party

and departed. That young lady did not at all object to her agreeable and handsome friend. The effect upon Mrs. Prideling was electric.

"My dear child, you look very tired; don't you think you had better go in and rest a little?"

Lord Lisle at once offered to escort her. Covered with confusion, and understanding the words too well, Miss Hesketh declared that she was not in the least fatigued.

"Ah, how exceedingly kind of you, Lord Lisle," said Theresa. "I am sure my niece is very much obliged to you. May I ask your lordship a favour?"

"Anything in the world."

"To introduce your friend, Mr. Grey, to Miss Maynard, who is standing over there; he asked me just now."

"Mary, dear, Aunt Jane wants you," said a mild voice in that young lady's ear; she looked across the ground, and saw her mother nervously beckoning to her. In this manner was Miss Clara Prideling substituted for her cousin. When Eustace returned, the effort to conceal his annoyance was a sore trial to his politeness. Arthur Hesketh, who had overheard the whole, felt as if he should have liked to annihilate his relatives; but he prudently confined himself to taking notes of her behaviour, not only to his sisters, but to the Fiennes, whom she avoided, and to the Berthons, who, to his delight, were treating her rather more coldly than was politic. Having got ten minutes' talk with Berthon himself, and arranged an accidental meeting with Florence Prideling in the woods two days later, he did not think the afternoon thrown away.

Mr. Cranburn completely cut out Maurice with the

golden-haired Miss Montrésor, that sylph who played croquet with such exquisite temper, and had smiles for every creature under heaven. Fienne thanked his friend from the bottom of his heart. In vain did Theresa expect a general invitation to St. Cecily's. Lady Nora's laugh, she declared, was very brusque and unlady-like, and George Berthon's wife very stuck-up, considering her age and her husband's position. She began to be sorry she had snubbed Mr. Maynard in their presence.

All that afternoon Miss Delessert was trying to persuade herself that she was enjoying herself: but "that face—that face." Surely she was right; that face was there. Nothing very lovely, after all; handsome, sensual, flirt—she summed her rival up.

"Grey met Miss Maynard out riding the other day," observed Berthon to Bertie Greystone, who turned up as his mother prophesied; "he did not know who she was, and came home and told me he had seen a beauty. She is here to-day, and, by Jove! he was right: I don't admire the style, but she is certainly a fine girl. I wonder who that cold-blooded father of her's intends to sell her to?"

Bertie Greystone agreed that Miss Maynard was charming, but he did not evince any intention of disturbing Harley Grey's tête-à-tête; he was too busily occupied in taking note of the Hon. Maurice Fienne, upon whom he meant to make war, for the possession of the society of Lady Nora Celadon.

When Harley first caught sight of Evelyn Maynard at Mrs. Prideling's garden-party, he felt a traitor to himself. "I had an instinct she would be here," he said. "I shall avoid her."

Why he should avoid a pretty girl, whom he had

never spoken to in his life, he would have found some difficulty in explaining, himself. Before an hour had passed, he had begged an introduction, and found himself playing croquet and talking nonsense to Miss Evelyn Maynard. The awkwardness of the circumstance that she was the daughter of the chairman of Fienne's committee did not strike him at the time—awkward in the sense that he would have little chance of meeting her again. Miss Maynard was a beauty : she dressed elegantly, owned an unexceptionable figure, and flirted with all men worth the operation. She liked her new acquaintance, because he could talk amusingly, and played upon him with her fine eyes in a way which poor Marion in the distance thought abominable. He might as well amuse himself whilst he could : the world was whirling round him too fast for him to think or care.

Maynard and Berthon merely bowed ; his wife's cousin was more friendly, and once more in his life Fienne cursed the luck that cut him off from intimacy with a man whom he both liked and detested.

When all was over, Mrs. Prideling held a council. The fête was unanimously voted a great success—only the Grosvenor Square salons seemed further off somewhat than they had done in the morning, and many hard words followed the retreating Heskeths for having had the impertinence to acquit themselves favourably in the eyes of her male guests.

"Never mind, mamma," said Florence Prideling, "they do not often have the chance of enjoying themselves, poor girls."

John Maynard went home with a thunder-cloud on his brows.

CHAPTER X.

*"I grow discouraged, Sir; but since I knew
No rock so hard but that a little wave
May beat admission in a thousand years,
I recommenced."*

THE PRINCESS.

"I SHALL do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Samuel Prideling, emphatically, from the depths of his arm-chair, where, spectacles on nose and paper in hand, he had been for the last hour slowly digesting a substantial breakfast.

So few were the flat contradictions which Mrs. Prideling received from her husband in the course of a year, that she could afford to bear them with a certain degree of equanimity. On this occasion she knew quite well that, whatever "the kind" of which he spoke might be, he would end by doing anything she desired, as long as she set about the task of converting him in the right way. Having delivered himself of the sentiment expressed, Mr. Prideling relapsed into his columns; his wife busied herself in cutting off the dead leaves of the geraniums on the flower-stands in the window. Five minutes' silence ensued, in which interval her mind was made up.

"My dear boy," she thus accosted him, "you do not really mean that you refuse to go to St. Cecily's to-day?"

"Do not say, *I refuse*, dearest,—I think it unwise."

"You *must* decide one way or another, this morning."

Mr. Prideling took off his glasses, and looked the difficulty of the situation in the face. "I suppose I must, my dear," he said, after a pause.

"Why, then," continued his wife, "you must also see that it is to our interest to extend our connection ; both for Vivian's sake and the girls', you ought to get in with these Celadons ; what is the use else of having influence to dispose of?"

"To keep to our old friends until we are sure of our new ones, my dear."

"Old friends, indeed !" retorted Theresa. "What have the Fiennes done for you?—nothing whatever ! I saw plainly enough yesterday what was in the wind ; after having flirted disgracefully with Claire all this time, Maurice intends to marry Lady Nora, who, of course will snap at him. We ought to cut them, I consider."

Mrs. Prideling's Roman nose was raised defiantly in air, and she looked a match for any foe, much less did her amiable husband risk a collision.

"Well, well, Theresa, you always know best. I am sure I don't care who gets in ; they are both very nice young men. Mr. Berthon was certainly very agreeable to me yesterday. You know best, my dear, you know best."

Mrs. Prideling was far too clever to say that she knew that already, after the manner of woman ; so she merely contented herself with a smile of satisfaction, and set to work to crown the edifice.

"I like Mr. Berthon very well," she said, "although his wife behaved so coldly yesterday. We shall lay them under an immense obligation to us, and show the Fiennes that we are as good as they are."

Her husband winced in his chair. "Well, my dear,

you must arrange all that." She felt fully equal to it, and replied—

"You need not trouble in the least. Your name must be put on the committee to-day, and your cheque paid in ; they are in want of money, for I know that Mr. Berthon only gives a certain sum, and they have resolved to return him free of all expense beyond it."

"I will think about that," said Mr. Prideling, "only, my dear Theresa, I must have it borne in mind, that I will not give one farthing to go in bribery, this time."

"My dear Sam, you know quite well you will," returned the wife of his bosom, complacently ; and she might have named the reason,—that he was so completely identified with herself that he could not help it.

"You know," she went on, after they had settled some further preliminaries, "that that boy, Arthur, is quite thick with Mr. Berthon. I never knew such a set as these Heskeths in all my life ! He will be pushing his sisters in, if we do not look out. I detest that young upstart ! Well, now I shall go and write my letters, and you had better have the waggonette, and go over and see Mr. McKenzie about the new gardener."

So was settled the great question.

About that same hour John Maynard sat in the library at Fienne Park, looking over his morning's letters. His heavy features wore the sullenness they had contracted already yesterday evening : he had quickly seen for what end the ex-contractor's wife was playing her cards, and though inwardly he had the greatest contempt for the woman and her family, he was not more annoyed at the way in which she had so

insolently slighted him, than that Fienne should run the risk of losing Mr. Prideling's support ; which loss he knew, from the data furnished by the labours of Maurice's committee, would be sufficiently grave in its nature as to threaten the chances of his success.

There was one letter there whose interest and importance far outweighed that of the rest of his correspondence. The bottom left hand corner of the envelope bore the initials "E. F." Maynard cut it carefully open, and read the enclosed :

"Settringham Manor, Wilts,

"Sep. 18, 18—.

"DEAR MAYNARD,

"I have to thank you greatly for your disinterested kindness in going down to help the Hon. Mr. Fienne in his contest for Haddingford. Debrington writes from the Reform that it is likely to be closely pressed. I would impress upon you the great importance of preventing at the present time a success on the part of the Opposition. Use every means in your power to return Mr. Fienne, to whom tender my regards, and rely upon our support.

"Yours,

"FALKLAND."

He thrust his other letters away, rang the bell, and began walking up and down the room in a state of agitation, with the Premier's note in his hand.

"Have the goodness to tell Mr. Fienne that I should like to see him immediately, if he is disengaged."

The man delivered the message to Maurice, who came.

"My dear Maurice," said the member, taking him concernedly by the hand, "I must have a conversation with you. Let us go outside ; this room stifles me."

"Very well ; come along. Nothing disagreeable I hope. Will you have a weed ? I shall."

Maynard waited impatiently while Fienne lighted his cigar ; then they sallied forth into the park.

"I wish the election was over," said Miss Montrésor to Evelyn Maynard, as the gentlemen passed them, "Mr. Fienne looks bored to death. I cannot stand Mr. Maynard and he talking politics all day."

"I think papa is rather anxious about the result," said Evelyn, with a thoughtful expression, that lasted for a moment, in her voluptuous eyes. "I am sure I wish it was over, and then we might have some chance of seeing that pretty Lady Lilian Berthon again, and those nice people we met yesterday. What fun those Pridelings are !"

In the meantime Maurice Fienne and his political Mentor had passed the park palings, and were talking earnestly beneath the trees.

"Women, like her," said Maynard, "live for two objects only—the personal admiration of those men who are fools enough to waste it upon them—or, where they have the unfortunate appendages of daughters and a husband, what they call getting on in society. Miserable as these aims are, when bad luck places a woman like this in one's path, we must pander to these insatiable cravings of the sex, to get out of them what one wants. Now, you see from Falkland's letter what importance he attaches to your getting in ; from what I see of the place it is absolutely necessary to get Prideling's votes ; he is an ass

whom his wife, who is as clever as the devil, turns round her little finger—she will poison him some day, and marry some decrepit peer before she has done. You must pocket your pride for a day or two, and humour this woman. If you leave it to me, I will manage it ; only you must authorize me to promise anything and everything in your name—introductions in town, influence for their cub of a son—deny that you care a button for your cousin Lady Nora, and hint at an attachment to——”

“Good heavens, Maynard !” exclaimed Fienne, shaking himself loose from his arm ; “you will drive me wild ! Do what you like, but leave out such a damnable lie as that.”

“Liars must be met with lies,” said the lawyer, coolly ; “never fear, I will not commit you to a breach of promise prosecution. Let me see, it is now half-past eleven ; I will go at once and bell this cat. You have not half played your cards with this fellow, Maurice.”

“He is a cad ; I detest him and his brood.”

Maynard laughed, “Nonsense, my dear fellow, you must detest no one, but love most whom you cheat most. These are the men who, through their wives, rule the country. Do not despise contractors ; their fortunes, and those like theirs, sheer gambling, jobbing or robbery, are the modern Norman Conquests, from which spring ancient and titled families. Samuel Prideling Vivian Prideling, of Pridlington Court, will be a baron in the next generation as blue-blooded and aristocratic as yourself ; good-bye—set your mind at rest, and make up to Miss Montrésor.”

“I think Miss Maynard better far,” replied Maurice, laughing too. And so they parted ; Maynard across

the park towards Haddingford, and Fienne back to the lawn and its fair occupants.

"So he thinks Evelyn better fun," said the former to himself, as he strode away; "she can do as she likes; Ilceston Towers is better than this place. That fellow will hate his wife like the devil after a year's marriage; poor Evy! Well, if he did not, she would hate him; it is all one in the end."

Unlike his caution when paying a diplomatic visit to St. Cecily's, John Maynard trusted to the inspiration of the moment to circumvent Theresa Prideling. That lady received the announcement of her visitor with considerable surprise. She hastily retired from her boudoir to arrange her toilette, pondering in her mind on the probable cause of this unexpected event.

"Can I have been misled, after all, I wonder?" she asked herself, as she took from its recess a splendid braid of hair and crowned herself therewith. Then, bringing round her the ample folds of her dress with a sweep, she gave herself one approving glance from head to foot in the cheval glass of her wardrobe, and descended to meet him, thanking heaven devoutly for having removed her husband from the house for the time being.

"I must apologize," said the ambassador, rising from his seat and advancing across the room, "for intruding upon you at this hour of the morning, but the urgency of my message from Lord Fienne to your husband led me to trespass upon your kind indulgence."

Mrs. Prideling smiled graciously, and disposed her fine figure upon the sofa.

"Do not apologize, pray," she replied. "When my

husband is away on business, I am always happy to be of any service to him."

"Then I do not commit any crime I hope, in not regretting his absence?" said Maynard.

"You must deliver your message first, and reserve your compliments, Mr. Maynard," answered Theresa, unfolding her fan and counting her rings with down-cast eyes.

"I will do as you command me," her visitor proceeded. "Of course you are aware how much young Mr. Fienne has to rely upon his old friends in his present struggle. I do not disguise from you for a moment that he has anxiously hoped for and expected the support of your family. You must forgive me for being plain-spoken, Mrs. Prideling, but I assure you that he is quite concerned that he has in some way offended you, and especially your fair daughter, Miss Clara Prideling, for he tells me that she received him quite coldly yesterday."

Theresa's heart began to beat violently. "I do not understand you, Mr. Maynard, it is impossible that we could feel anything but the most friendly sentiments towards Mr. Fienne—and as for my daughter—"

"Well, well, I beg you will not think it anything more than my young friend's anxiety. Still he would be only too glad to receive the assurance of your continued good-will."

Theresa's face was, strangely for her, covered with confusion. "I must tell you, Mr. Maynard," she said, hesitating between every word, "that Mr. Prideling has already given his support to Mr. Berthon."

"You do not mean that?" exclaimed Maynard in a tone of voice which was sweet unto his listener's ears, as implying the intensest concern and astonishment;

"it will, indeed, be a tremendous blow to him, I assure you," he went on rapidly. "Events have occurred which make it most important he should win the election. A letter from the Premier this morning informs me that our proceedings are watched with the greatest interest. I feel certain that, had your husband been the means of that wish being realized, his services would never have been forgotten."

"There might be a possibility of his re-considering his determination," said Theresa with well feigned anxiety.

"Really, Mrs. Prideling? Has he not then communicated his intention to the Conservative Committee?"

"No, he goes there this afternoon."

"I can only tell you," continued Maynard with warmth, "that nothing will repay you if you succeed in persuading him how immensely for his interests it would be to help Mr. Fienne. So little did he suspect there was any doubt about your support, that he empowered me to ask you whether you would honour the family by dining with the heads of the Party at Fienne House the day after to-morrow, to meet the Earl and Countess of Luke and Bandon, and others. Indeed, Miss Fienne may have written the invitation this morning, for your husband, yourself, and your eldest daughter, who, you know, is so much admired. As I have not concealed from you how much we are in need of your assistance, I shall not hesitate to assure you that Mr. Fienne will consider himself under a lasting obligation to you, Mrs. Prideling, and your family; I could congratulate you, indeed, on the prospects of your son, Mr. Vivian Prideling, whose position as one of the secretaries in the House of

Lords, will be immensely improved by our obligations to his father."

"He will know how to value your good will, I am sure," returned Theresa, whose plans were thus swept away; "he has not promised Mr. Berthon, so far as I am aware, at present, and I will not fail to place before him the arguments you have urged."

"I have great respect for the Berthons; but of course they occupy a very different position altogether. You have heard of Lady Nora's engagement, I suppose?"

"No, indeed, I have not!" said Mrs. Prideling with indescribable alacrity.

"Oh yes, she is engaged to Mr. Hailsham, the great racing squire of Leicestershire: they do not marry well, I am afraid; but," he continues, "that is only in passing. I shall then tell my friend that you will do all in your power; he will be very disappointed if you do not come to the dinner."

"About his political sentiments," said Theresa, "I should like to know really whether he is for levelling up, or levelling down; his address is very vague, you know?" she added laughing.

"As for that," replied the astute ambassador, "I believe he is for keeping everything smooth—which is neither, I suppose—and above all, for enforcing by legislation, the due rights of your charming sex."

"Now, Mr. Maynard, you are getting complimentary again, and I never believe in flatterers. Of course you will stay to lunch; we cannot allow you to return all that way this hot morning."

John Maynard stayed, but it was only for the sake of seeing Samuel Prideling, Esquire. He had never

done a better stroke of business, and was anxious, moreover, to get back and arrange for the Pridelings' invitation to the dinner-party—a matter of excusable invention at present—and to prime Fienne with the manufactured rumour of his cousin's engagement. It was with difficulty that he repressed his merriment at lunch. As for Theresa, she thanked her stars for having brought the Fiennes to book, no less than for the lucky interval she had allowed to elapse before her husband—whom she knew would take kindly enough to the change about to occur—had communicated his now obsolete intentions to George Berthon's Committee.

Eustace Celadon was out riding alone that afternoon; a look of extreme anxiety was on his usually débonnaire handsome face, as he dismounted on his return, and halloed to Berthon in the garden, to come to him.

"My dear fellow," he said, "your chance is gone. As I came through Haddingford, I saw Prideling's name on the list of Fienne's committee, and Simmons tells me that he has paid three hundred pounds towards expenses. It's all that devil Maynard's doing, for I met the fox coming out of the gate of the villa this very afternoon."

"The plot thickens with a vengeance," said George quietly, "never mind, it's not over yet."

CHAPTER XI.

"Dios me libre de hombre de un libro."

SPANISH PROVERB.

By seven o'clock on the morning following the day of the events detailed in the foregoing chapter, George Berthon was up and walking about in his garden. An excitement and anxiety, which increased with every day that brought the election nearer, deprived him of many hours of rest. Men who are young enough to have any of the fire and force of life left in them, do not all at once accustom themselves to the phlegmatic temperament becoming the revered seigneurs of St. Stephens; and the possibility—unfortunately, for George, growing gradually remoter—of becoming an M.P. in the flesh, sent the blood bounding with excitement through his veins, and kindled a great flame of expectation, and many shadowy ambitions in his soul. He forgot, as he walked about alone that morning, the tremendous hard work awaiting him in town, he forgot that dreamy delightful world which thoughts of *her* used to people, that beautiful being now reduced into possession by the prosaic name of *wife*—and he thought only of the greatness that was perhaps opening out to him in the future. There was no need to think of Lilian: was she not part of himself, and would not his greatness be her's also?

"Good morning, Mister George!" said a cheery voice beside him. "Out early this morning, sir—best part o' the day by far, thinks I—it's the early bird picks up the early worm, Mister George."

Mr. Smythe, for it was he, always accosted his

master by the name he had known him by at Ilceston Towers in former days. It was a link that bound him to a happy time, even though the present were more so—and Berthon liked it.

"Good morning to you, Bob," he said, discovering the speaker, who, with his coat off and sleeves tucked up, was going through some mysterious botanical operation. "According to your version, the worm would have been better off had he been less early in his habits—would he not?"

"Maybe he would," replied Bob, pausing reflectively.

"I have a hard day's work before me," George went on, glad of a chat to relieve his thoughts, "and I came out to think it over; electioneering is hot work in September, and canvassing is the worst part of it."

"I'm afraid you won't get in, sir."

"Why, Bob?"

"The enemy's too strong, Mister George — too strong for you. You're too honest, sir, to tackle those rogues. I was in town last night, and heard that weasel, Adolphus Spriggs, spoutin' his American ideas—and I'm pretty certain, sir, as how they'll circumvent you with any diabolical tricks they can lay their dirty hands to; I'm no politician, Mister George, but that's my opinion,—that is."

"I have no doubt he very much maligned America," replied George, smiling.

"I says charity's the best policy, and they've none of it—not a bit," continued Bob emphatically, "and they'll paint you as black as the devil, Mister George, —you see if they don't, and who's to know the contrary!"

"You are complimentary, certainly," said Berthon, laughing heartily at Bob Smythe's frankness.

"Well, sir, I wish they was too," he replied gravely. "I don't like elections; there's an old proverb says, 'where wisdom is bliss 'tis jolly to be wise'—and I'd rather know nothing about them."

"Who comes here?" said George, seeing a lad trying the gate from the path that led down the wood. "That's one of the boys from Fen House," Bob exclaimed, shading his eyes from the brilliant eastern rays. The lad was the bearer of a note from John Maynard to Berthon, written that morning already, which showed that that august personage also thought the day too short for his work.

After his brilliant achievement of securing Theresa Prideling's alliance the day before, Maynard made up his mind to see what one more appeal to his opponent would do towards clearing the road for the success of his projects. He slept over the idea, and determined, when morning came, upon making the attempt. Accordingly, he wrote to Berthon, begging him to take his proposition in good faith, whatever impression he had unwittingly produced in his mind before he knew him better; he told him frankly enough that in Fienne's interest he had secured Mr. Prideling's support, and that from an intimate knowledge of the canvassing going on, there was not much chance of his working down Fienne's majority; he asked him seriously to consider the position, assured him of his sympathy, whatever might be his duty to his Party, and pledged himself to return him at some future time on independent principles for another place. Maynard's undertakings of this extraordinary nature were not altogether unjustified, so far as regarded his influence and

his ability to carry out his ends. "The plain truth of the matter is," he said to himself, as he sealed up the missive, "that I cannot afford to lose this game, and as it stands, with fair play, the issue is doubtful."

When he got Berthon's reply, an hour or two later, he said, "let it be so ; it shall be won then by foul means—he forces me to will it so."

This so far anticipates Berthon's decision upon the offer. Beneath Maynard's civility lay his satire, and yet beyond that, what George was acute enough to feel, the man's dislike of him. He waited till after breakfast, and then wrote his reply, short, polite, but decisive.

"SIR,

"I thank you for your courtesy, and certainly take your message in perfect good faith, and without prejudice to what may follow. I cannot now reconsider my determination to contest the election, even if my position be, as you think, hopeless. I should be happy to accept your proposal were it consistent with my own principles ; as it is not so, I cannot offer you my regrets, but if you win the day for Mr. Fienne, I trust that, as you find me an honourable opponent, so you will accept my congratulation on your success.

"Yours faithfully,

"G. BERTHON."

Harley consented to ride over with the letter that morning, whilst Berthon himself, with Eustace, made ready to do a day's campaigning in Haddingford.

Lilian stood upon the lawn to see them off. Since the episode of Mrs. Greystone's visit and the garden fête at the Villa Dante, she had awoke to a much more lively interest in events. Marion's gentle dis-

suasion did not draw from her any sympathy now. She accepted the inevitable necessity of merging herself in her husband, and her great love for him no longer contended with imaginary independent obligations. She received his cavalier salute with the sunniest of smiles, and they drove away as light-hearted as circumstances admitted of.

The deceased member, Mr. Richard Fienne, had drifted with the political current of the times, and merged almost unconsciously from early Whiggism into Radical principles. The growing discontent in Haddingford he took little note of ; but, at the time he died, there were anxious signs of a revolt among his constituents, that lacked neither influence nor organization. When the outbreak came, it raged pretty hotly, and during the last few days the town had been at fever heat.

Around them as they threaded the narrow thoroughfares were all the paraphernalia of that social war to the knife in which the true-born Briton delights. If the number of huge placards in blue, red and yellow, of "Berthon for ever !" and "Fienne for ever !" were to be taken as a sign, the fact of the eternal perfections and immortality of the respective candidates was assured. As they alighted at their committee-rooms a loud cheer, mingled, as with a minor, with deep groans, saluted them from the crowd ; for on that day Fienne was to be entertained on a grand scale, and in the evening was to deliver himself of his pent-up eloquence.

The report was fairly good, but much remained to be done. That neutral element in every body of electors gave no decided sign of partisanship, and the more Berthon saw of them, the more he became con-

vinced that whoever wanted their votes would have to buy them.

The books were examined, the prospect anxiously discussed, routine and official business gone through, and then the real work began.

"I am sorry you lost Prideling," said Eustace, as they issued forth.

"I should never have heard the last of it; that woman would have plagued my life out."

"What a cute fellow Maynard is! I wonder how he got round her?"

"Promised a price he does not intend to pay, you may be sure of it."

"If I were Prideling, I should hang myself," Lord Lisle returned, with a total misconception of that individual's connubial felicity.

Some of those whom they urged that morning to exercise their great privilege of the franchise in their favour, amused them not a little. A small baker, who lived in the market-place, assured Eustace that he was no politician: "If I was, my lord—that is, if I had any political principles, you understand—I should be happy to support you, because I'm sure, my lord, your principles would be mine."

"Well, my good sir, will you not vote at all?"

"O yes, my lord—I'm obliged to do that."

"And what principles do you go upon, then?"

"No principles at all, my lord—I vote for the best man."

"Don't you consider Mr. Berthon the best man?"

"No, my lord; I consider Mr. Fienne the best man."

"Will you tell me why?"

The tradesman opened the door of the little back-parlour.

"Biddy, my dear," he said, calling to his wife, "just come here a moment, and tell this gentleman why Mr. Fienne is the best man."

The woman wiped her wet hands and arms with her apron, and looked naively at Eustace.

"I would do so, sir," she said, dropping a curtsy, "but Mr. Maynard told me not to."

It was very evident that there was nothing to be done in that quarter, and the deputation retired.

Nothing daunted, Eustace joined Berthon, and they paid a visit to the baker's next-door neighbour, a teacher in the national schools, who ornamented his small window with a very big text printed on a card. This gentleman eyed his visitors critically before he ventured to return their salutation. In reply to inquiries, he asked Berthon whether he was prepared to stand by the true faith. "By the true faith, I mean the true Church," he explained.

"There seems to be considerable doubt as to the rival claims to that honour," said George, gravely. "When I find the true Church, I shall certainly stand by it."

"Mr. Berthon, the one true Church is the Church of England; if you entertain any doubt—which God forbid—I shall only be too happy——"

"I assure you," here broke in Eustace, with alarm in his mind, "that my friend is quite willing to take it upon trust from you."

Berthon felt uncomfortable, but triumph lit up the attenuated features of the schoolmaster.

"If you will uphold in life and death the union between our holy Church and State, sir, my support,

both temporal and spiritual, you shall have," said the man.

I am afraid Berthon was put to the use of much sophistry to convince the schoolman that his principles on that all-important point were sound ; however, he succeeded in securing his vote, and breathed freer when he regained the open air.

"Your interruption," he remarked to his brother-in-law, as he took his arm, "saved us from an exposition of the Apocalypse."

"Poor man!" said Eustace, "it is only charitable to hope that he may never realise his own idea of heaven."

Whilst these mercenary worldlings were pursuing their nefarious practices in Haddingford, Harley had ridden away on the more pleasant task of conveying Berthon's ultimatum to Maynard to Fienne House. After a while he slackened his rein, and leisurely mounted the hill towards the park gates. As he reached them, there appeared in the lane which meets the road at right angles at this point, the figures of two equestrians, like himself making apparently for the house. Both were ladies ; at a distance behind them rode the groom. Harley recognised in a moment Miss Evelyn Maynard and Miss Montrésor.

His first impulse, after answering the former's graceful bow, was to let them pass on, but a blithe voice, whose tones seemed to awake in him an echo of what he knew not, except that it was some old delight, invited him to join them as far as the house. To be sure, it was not very far to ride in company, and the few words of conversation that passed were very common-place, but, for some reason or another, Harley's

thoughts were of those few moments all the rest of that day.

"You do not seem very talkative this morning, Mr. Grey," said Evelyn, rallying him; "are you the bearer of an unwelcome message, then?"

"I hope not," he returns, looking into her wonderful eyes; "if I am not talkative, it is, I suppose, because I prefer to listen to you."

"That is quite wrong; it is a man's place to amuse us poor women: for what other purpose is he useful?"

"It is impossible to argue the point, Miss Maynard, with you, but I think it would be more amusing to you to laugh *at* a person than *with* them."

The flush of the wind upon her cheek was dyed a little deeper.

"I hope I am not so disagreeable," she says, looking down. She looked beautiful on horseback, and knew it, of course; Harley could not help admiring immensely her perfect figure and the consummate grace with which she rode.

"I am delighted to beg your pardon for the misapprehension," he returns, with a side glance at the immovable features of the golden-haired Miss Montrésor.

"You have a note for my father; shall I save you any trouble by taking charge of it?" she asks, as they reach the house.

"Thank you very much," he replies; "I shall consider it delivered into his own hands."

He sprang from his horse, and assisted her to dismount. Her impassive companion preferred the ready attention of the groom. Miss Maynard had drawn off her glove and offered him her lily hand to say good-bye. Mr. Cranburn made his appearance.

"I wish you could stop," she said to Harley, "we should appreciate your skill at croquet."

He regretted the impossibility of giving himself that pleasure, and with one parting glance at her handsome, laughing face, lifted his hat, and rode away.

"I like Mr. Grey," she said, coquettishly, when he was gone. Mr. Cranburn stared.

"I do not think he's anybody," suggested that young swell.

"Only more of a gentleman than most men," said Evelyn, and swept by him like a queen into the house.

Harley Grey went slowly homewards, thinking of her. He had once thanked God that he had never seen a woman whose remembrance could trouble his peace. He recollected his words to Berthon on that evening, and thought now they were spoken foolishly.



CHAPTER XII.

"I frutti proibiti sono i più dolci." ITAL. PROV.

LET moralists say what they will, it is money, after all, which makes life tolerable. Let the average human animal count up his anxieties: whence do they spring? Want of money—care of money. Let him who sighs for the unattainable ask himself, through what agency alone could he procure it? The answer is—money. Money, true, cannot procure love, and since there is no happiness without love, therefore money cannot purchase happiness; that looks very logical on paper, but how about the truth in practical life? If money cannot buy love, it can, at all events,

clear the soil of the wilderness of the weeds, thorns, and briars, among which love cannot flourish. What most men count for happiness, whether they be right or wrong, can most certainly be bought for money. It may be true, also, that possession is the grave of pleasure, and that one wish gratified gives place to a new one. To this it may be answered, that the cares which arise from anxieties in money matters are real, wearing, and pitiless; but those which we substitute for them, when money has cleared the former cares away, are shadowy, fanciful, and unreal. Money cannot guard against Misfortune in the abstract, but that Sister of the Eumenides has many garbs, many faces, and many types, and it is only a few of the tribe who can get at their victim over piles of gold. You talk of discontent, bodily sickness, loss, depravity, ignorance, want of talent, want of taste, and a hundred other woes, and hurl them in the face of the millionaire. Why will not his money help him? Simply because

“cursed is the gold that gilds the straiten’d forehead of the fool.”

Something to this effect were the reflections of Arthur Hesketh as he lay at full length upon the grass in the woods, on the afternoon of the second day after his aunt’s fête champêtre, keeping his tryst with Florence Prideling. He was poor, as we know, and he wished he was not so, as was natural; and, contemplating the great social gulf that separated him and his from the Pridelings, he, plausibly enough, put it down to money, which they had and he had not, and moralized, as above, upon the situation.

Arthur Hesketh had never troubled his head upon such abstruse matters as, the reader will recollect,

formed the subject of conversation between the Hon. Maurice Fienne and John Maynard, upon a certain occasion ; he had not known many women, and as his cousin Florence was the prettiest and nicest of them all, he of course declared himself to be violently in love with her ; and he being, as we suppose, born under a fortunate star, if not in money affairs, at least in love, the lady of his affections reciprocated the attachment. He was going back to London to his work in a day or two, and Miss Florence, knowing that, was not troubled in conscience at making an assignation with him.

O Theresa, wisest of women, how could you be such a fool as not to see the audacious designs of that young arch conspirator ?

By-and-bye Florence arrived, and then there were kisses not a few, after the Paul et Virginie type, but, I am afraid, without any blushes on the part of the young lady. When a foolish youth is madly in love with a foolish maiden, whom the fates and Theresa Pridelings of this world decree that he can never wed, a little latitude in those early, happy, undiscovered days, may be allowed in that respect.

Then they began to stroll about beneath the cloudless heavens and the summer trees, and to talk as lovers talk. Had it not been for something very significant which happened shortly afterwards on that afternoon, we might have left these poor children to themselves and their happiness, without eaves-dropping their innocent love-making.

"What would you say, Flo, if your mother found out that you met me like this ?"

Arthur had his arm round his lady-love's waist, and

she was knocking the heads off the blue-bells with the point of her parachute, after the manner of such.

"I don't know, and don't care," she said.

"I know," he replied quickly. "She would forbid you ever to meet me again, and you would have to obey her. She hates me like poison now."

"Nonsense, Arthur—hates you! you should make up to her, and she would like you immensely."

"God forbid!" muttered the young man devoutly.

Florence did not seem at all surprised at the sentiment, but continued—

"You will be a rich man some day, Arthur, and then you can do as you like."

"That is what all women think," said he, mournfully, "but it is only speculators and swindlers who make fortunes now-a-days, Flo."

"I don't believe it, nor do you really; I am quite sure that Mr. Berthon would do anything for you."

"I wish I was Mr. Berthon," said Arthur.

"What! and be married to Lady Lilian?"

"No, not exactly that, but to some one else, which is all the same."

"Is she not a beautiful woman?"

"She certainly is that; how would you like your sister Clara to marry her brother?"

"How absurd you are, Arthur?"

"Not at all: your mother means her to, I believe."

"You are very hard upon mamma, and I forbid you to say anything more about her. Look! there are two people coming along the path!" exclaimed Miss Prideling, disengaging herself from her cousin's arm, "one of them is that horrid Mr. Maynard—come, let us hide in the trees."

She vanished like a startled fawn into the wood, and her young lover followed her more slowly. The spot was not a much frequented one, and unless one had a suspicion of being followed by brigands, one did not generally imagine, when there, any human beings within ear-shot. Had John Maynard not thought so, the probability is that he would not have been walking and talking there, that afternoon, in company with Mr. Adolphus Spriggs. As they advanced slowly along the path, they talked aloud one to the other. I have no doubt but that Arthur would have much liked to know the subject of that earnest conversation, for there was but one topic which could possibly bring together, at such a place, and at such a time, two such dissimilar individuals as John Maynard, Esq., M.P., and mine host of the "Eagle," Haddingford. But I do not think he would have cared to listen, had he not heard Maynard distinctly mention his own name. Despite the warning of the proverb, it is impossible not to lengthen one's ears, if possible, at the sound of one's own name. Accordingly young Hesketh halted in his ambush, and this was what he heard—

"— Arthur Hesketh, is that his name? well, you must be on your guard, Spriggs; his aunt tells me that he is a good-for nothing fellow, but as sharp as a needle, and is a regular ferret in the place, on the enemy's side."

"I don't agree at all, not at all, Mr. Maynard, with Mrs. Prideling; I know Mr. Hesketh, and like him fairly well; always very friendly to me, sir—you understand—but I've no doubt he's devilish sharp, and though I don't object to him as an individual, I does greatly so as a citizen, that is, as a political unit of

this great empire, Mr. Maynard. You understand, sir, and I'll be on my guard."

"Well, Spriggs, then there's Tomkins; ten pounds the rascal asks, you will see him to-night, and——"

Here the pair disappeared round a bend in the path, and Arthur Hesketh heard no more.

He stood, ruminating for some seconds, where he was. "So she thinks me a good-for-nothing fellow, does she?" he muttered; "well, Flo. does not, that's one comfort—the old cat!" He clenched his teeth, but not with vexation: if there was anything he enjoyed more than another, it was being out on the war-trail of his Aunt Prideling. Somebody touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Are they gone?" she whispered, looking up and down the wood.

"Yes, darling, they are; let us go in the same direction; they won't come back."

For half-an-hour they strolled along; and there comes to each of us few such half-hours as that was to that boy and girl.

"I shall always think of you, pet," he said, fondly caressing her hand, "you can write sometimes, you know, and Lizzie will give you my letters."

"Very well, Arthur, dear, and you will tell me all about your work, and how you get on, you promise me?" He was about to lift her over the stile, where they were to part, when his eye was attracted by a piece of note-paper lying on the ground, among the dock leaves and nettles. He picked it up, and changed colour as he glanced at it. Florence read it too. It was only a pencil memorandum, in the handwriting of John Maynard, containing a list of names of certain inhabitants of Haddingford, with sundry sums of

money written opposite to each. Mr. Adolphus Spriggs had dropped it probably, crossing the stile. Had Arthur Hesketh known with what infinite labour, perplexities, and cold sweats the unhappy Spriggs would hunt for that precious document on the morrow, his compassion must have obliged him to leave it where it was found. But on this occasion, having perused it, he folded it carefully together, and placed it in his pocket-book. Florence Prideling's curiosity was easily satisfied ; she cared nothing about elections, and knew less, and he hastened to change the subject : I will not recount that leave-taking between the cousins, but we will go after Messrs. Maynard and Spriggs, and see what their destination was.

It was the same day as that on which Berthon and Eustace Celadon had gone canvassing in Haddingford, and Harley Grey had, unfortunately for his further peace of mind, carried the note to Fienne House. That day there was to be, as has already been stated, great doings in Haddingford. The Hon. Maurice Fienne, supported by John Maynard, Esq., M.P., and a great many other dignitaries, was to address his constituents in the evening, at the town hall. By the time that Mr. Spriggs, and his illustrious patron for the time being, reached the town, the hubbub of the event had begun.

The pair soon separated. Maynard proceeded to his committee-rooms, and Adolphus Spriggs to the congenial society gathered round his own "almighty bar."

"Do your best to-night," said the Q.C., taking Maurice by the hand, when he met him ; "I have secured the last chance. If you tell these boorish knaves down here political truths, embroider them to

suit their own fancy ; exaggeration costs nothing, and goes down with these fellows like their own vile liquor."

When Fienne met his constituents he was mindful of the injunction. There was a great crowd to hear him, for he spoke well, and Maynard was a noted orator. Neither were the Blues wanting, and Adolphus Spriggs and his compatriots had many a free-fight with the enemy before the evening was over. Fienne was nervous in his manner at first, but when once he warmed to his work he went away gamely. As for Maynard, when he rose to address the meeting, he went off, to use Mr. Spriggs' expression, "like a tarnation water-spout." He was cursing Berthon in his heart for his note of the morning, and his lips did not spare him.

"And now, my boys," he shouted, "what is this young aristocrat going to do for you?" (forgetting the social status of his own protégé altogether) "what are his connections? he talks to you of independent principles—why, he has not any at all," (cheers), "and we all know that his new relations are the bluest of the blue!" (groans and cheers). "It is we—it is my honourable friend here" (pointing to Fienne) "who is really independent; what is the good of a principle if it is not backed up by a majority?" (voice: 'go it six-and-eightpence.'). "He is called a Radical—well, if by a radical is meant a man who goes to the root of a thing—a man who thoroughly understands what he is about"—(hear, hear), "if by a radical is meant a friend of the sovereign People," (cheers), "why, then we are proud to bear that name!" (loud cheers). "I will tell you what Mr. Berthon is; he is a very clever fellow," (hear, hear), "too clever for you and me, a good deal;

he is an independent Tory" (laughter and cheers). "Wait a bit, my friends, till the party have bled him ; we know their game, of old. They know how to tackle young colts like him" (laughter). "If **you** want to stop where you are—if you want to be highly respectable and utterly useless, at **home** and abroad, take this youthful independent Tory," (hear, hear); "but if you **want** a man to go with the times—a supporter of a true government—a practical, reforming legislator—there is Mr. Fienne, elect him!" (loud cheers). This came at the fag end of three quarters of an hour's talking, or rather, shouting ; and the honourable gentleman was not sorry to resume his seat.

But it is time to leave the human roaring, and get a quiet cigar in the night-air outside.



CHAPTER XIII.

*"No wild enthusiast ever yet could rest
Till half mankind were like himself possess'd."*

COWPER.

THE day of the Nomination had arrived. There might be, and probably was, great excitement in Haddingford from an early hour, but round the breakfast-table at St. Cecily's calm reigned, at least outwardly. Berthon, having for some time been closeted with his principal agent, had despatched that astute individual into Haddingford, to break his fast on the way with Mr. Wittithorne at the "Old Oak." Our worthy host

had some misgivings as to the indication of the political barometer.

"My dear Mr. Snivel," he thus apostrophized the agent, "I am very glad to see you—very glad indeed; how are they all up at the house, God bless them! I find this sort of thing very trying to the feelings, Mr. Snivel, very; and very wearing to the nerves; you don't?—ah! you see, it pays with you!"

"On the contrary, out of pocket, my good sir—out of pocket, I assure you."

Wittithorne opened his mild eyes with amazement.

"Well, well!" he said, with a little chuckle and a wink, which signified that "he knew better." "I daresay, Mr. Snivel. But now you want some breakfast, of course; and Mrs. Wittithorne will be blowing me up for ill-treating your stomach—very particular about her guests' stomachs is Mrs. Wittithorne, Mr. Snivel, I can tell you: how will the day go, do you think?"

"Day go?" laconically replied that oracle, fixing his hands in his trouser pockets, and beginning to pace the parlour meditatively; "well, that's a toss-up. Between you and me, Mr. Wittithorne, Mr. Berthon is throwing his chance to the dogs!"

"You don't mean to say so! impossible!" gasped the staunch supporter of the old colours.

"Yes, I do; I have been at him since six this morning, proving to him over and over again that unless he tips the neutrals he'll not get in. Lor' bless my soul, Mr. Wittithorne, d'ye think that Bark won't?"

"Well," said the host, "what does Mr. Berthon say?"

"Say, man? why, he swears that he won't spend a penny, and he's as obstinate as a mule."

Messrs. Bark and Snivel—the former of whom was Fienne's agent—evidently knew their business better than to play the fool in that manner. The mule of whom Mr. Snivel spoke was, however, contriving to be pretty cheerful under the circumstances. When he entered the breakfast-room from the study, with his brother-in-law, Eustace, a pair of arms was thrown round his neck, which might well have weaned most weak mortals from other cares, and a fair little face was peering into his serious eyes over the mountain of his moustache.

"Well, darling," says the sweetest voice he ever heard, "what does he say?"

"He wants another £100, and I will not let him have it."

"Thank you—thank you, dearest!" she replies, pressing her lips to his cheek; "now come to breakfast—you must be tired already."

One would have thought that George had never been up at five in the morning before in his life. The party at St. Cecily's was increased now; besides those for whom Lilian had somehow to make shift in the house, Bertie Greystone had come over from Liston, and two other magnates of the county.

"Lady Nora, as you ladies have decided upon bearding these Radical scoundrels in their own den, I offer you my humble services for your protection," said Captain Greystone with his usual self-assurance, after breakfast.

"I am infinitely beholden to you," returned the object of his devotion, with much sham modesty; "as

I mean to keep well in the rear, I should deprive you of the satisfaction of being well to the front."

How the gallant captain was thus to reconcile his duty with his inclination, he wisely left to events to decide, and, having constituted himself Lady Nora's protector, made up his mind to share its pleasures with its dangers.

Marion Delessert's heart fluttered as she observed Harley Grey making his way towards her on the lawn.

"I am afraid I am in your bad books, Miss Delessert."

"Why?" she asks, raising her fawn-like eyes to his.

"You have really hardly spoken to me during the last two or three days."

She colours violently.

"I really was not aware of it, Mr. Grey."

"I have not offended you, then?"

"How could you think so!"

"Well, then—I should like to be your attendant to-day, if you will let me?"

"I am too much honoured, I am sure. If you will promise me not to improvise very laborious duties for yourself, I will let you."

"Duties there may be—but laborious I cannot imagine anything which Miss Delessert could command."

How can he speak so seriously to a woman who looks and smiles as Marion Delessert! She raises her parasol to hide her blushes, and gives him her shawl to carry, as the drag is coming round the corner.

Whilst the ladies were being deposited safely in

their lofty positions, and Lord Lisle was teasing Marion with the fact that it was church morning, and therefore that she ought to be elsewhere than electioneering in Haddingford, Berthon was exchanging a few last words with Bob Smythe in the garden.

"No, sir—no, sir," reiterated the old Ilceston tenant in reply to George's inquiry why he was not going into town with the rest; "I'm not a public man, Master George; and besides, there's some'un wanted here to look after the place."

"Nonsense, Bob; we want some honest fellows, like you; why, you won't hear my speech to the electors."

"Honesty begins at home, sir, and I'm more use here. As for your speech, Master George, I'm pretty certain it's a good 'un, and I'll read it afterwards; I only wish that Mr. Landon was here, sir, to-day."

"So do I, Bob; but, all the same, I would rather stand on my own ground in this matter."

"Well, sir, I wish you good luck, and I see those young ladies a wavin' to you to come; take care of Mr. Maynard, sir—take care of him."

"Why him particularly?"

"Well, never mind, sir; but I know him longer nor you do, Master George, and I don't like him—'specially lately. You'll excuse me, Master George, but I always say—don't holloa when you're in a wood; and he's wuss than most wild animals you'll find there."

So Berthon left his faithful retainer to his own musings and his pipe, and rejoined the party on the drag.

He, himself, as in duty bound, piloted the four greys into Haddingford, with Lady Lilian, smiling and brilliant, in light blue silk and white lace, at his

side. The country was alive that morning with vehicles making their way from all parts to the old-fashioned market-town in the valley. Farmers, big in body and cheery in heart, in their dog-carts, with blue ribbons streaming from the whips with which they saluted the St. Cecily's four-in-hand as it came dashing along the road,—other farmers, young, and got up *à la* Hyde Park, in the newest pattern gigs, some with a bride or a sister, but all, horse, woman, whip, and man decorated somewhere with red or yellow tokens, mostly the former, of attachment to the house of Fienne, or, what they imagined signified thereby—universal equality of heaven-born man in the abstract. Then there was war in Haddingford, and many were the black looks and the groans amid the ringing cheers, as the four greys came trotting up the High Street, and merrily the morning sun flashed on the silver-mounted harness, and the brilliant dresses of those fairest women in the county, as many swore that day, Lilian Berthon, and Lady Nora Celadon. Then the crowd grew dense, and the uproar universal, and evident hostilities began to shew themselves in quarters. The drag was accompanied by many other vehicles of all descriptions containing Berthon's supporters, and the free and independent Britons who thronged the streets could not—despite the presence of the indefatigable Maynard's agents at their very elbow—resist the scenic effect of the gallant cortège, Berthon's somewhat triumphant bearing, and above all the toilettes and looks of the ladies—so, radical to the backbone as some of them were, they burst in a round of cheering that brought a flash of pride into the cheeks of the dextrous handler of the ribbons. But even Britons are fickle, and popular applause is ephemeral, for

when, coming into the market-place from the opposite side, Fienne's barouche and postilions appeared, the throng swept that way and the shouting redoubled. So the candidates arrived at the hustings, and were not sorry to gain its partial shelter; for though the Haddingford mob and roughs were mild in kind as compared with the rabble of Bristol or Birmingham, they made up in noise what they lacked in numbers and quality, and atoned for the want of actual atrocity by emulating their cosmopolitan contemporaries in the variety of their missiles, both material and verbal, and their skill in the use of them. Red powder among the ladies of the light blue faction created much the same moral effect as the bursting of a shell in the midst of a body of recruits, and Marion Delessert vowed that as it was her first, so it should be her last, experience of a nomination day.

In spite of all the legislative authority of St. Stephens, the Haddingfordians made the air resound with improvised bands of what they were pleased to call music—much the same harmony being the result as one imagines must have proceeded from King Nebuchadnezzar's motley orchestra, and which "musick" is so suggestively spelt with a "k." Likewise did they flaunt various devices, and republican ensigns were not wanting to flatter the complacency of the eminent representative of the Reform Club who surveyed the lively scene from the front of the hustings.

Enter John Maynard, Esq., Q.C., M.P., the Friend of the People! and if ever a man and a politician damned "the People" in his heart of hearts, that man was the same John Maynard.

However, there he is to do the fighting for that thin sallcw-looking young man, of slight and gentlemanly

figure, and quick dark eye, who stands beside him, with a moody expression upon his face—poor Maurice ! Even, at that moment, he was forgetting the stupendous importance to the well being of England and her people of the triumph of the principles he was there to uphold, and was vowing hatred against the innocent Captain of the Guards, who was muttering soft nonsense in the ear of the seemingly impassive Lady Nora Celadon, who, in Maurice's eyes, had never looked more stately or more beautiful than she did at that moment.

The sheriff who conducted the proceedings soon, however, put a new aspect upon affairs ; and the mob was shouted at to cease shouting, whilst Henry Halidane, Esq., of Crosby Hall, came forward and proposed that the Hon. Maurice Fienne was a fitting man to represent that ancient, loyal and Liberal borough in Parliament. Mr. Halidane had been in Parliament himself, and was a man who had made his own fortune—which was a big one—and the staunch supporter of the house of Fienne. He lived in style at his new country seat, and was one of the innumerable examples of violent democrats who settle down comfortably to the enjoyment of ten thousand a year and the patronage of ancient peers of the realm. He did not detain them long by his speech, neither did John Maynard, who seconded the nomination, and who knew the bounds of such an audience's patience, and wished Fienne to do his best himself.

Then came the turn of the Opposition, those abominable interlopers, the supporters of George Berthon, Esq. Colonel the Hon. Cecil Antrobus, was one of those men of the world, who, Liberal in politics individually, saw through, or thought he saw through, the

humbug of ultra-radical pretensions, and who believed thoroughly that George Berthon was no more of what was once understood as a Tory, than he himself was ; so he supported him as a vigorous and sufficiently clever young man of sound but independent principles, and now stood forward, and in a short manly speech as befitted a soldier, proposed Mr. Berthon in opposition to Mr. Halidane's nomination.

George was less fortunate in his seconder, Mr. Christopher Hope, a respectable man of note in Haddingford, the leader of that important section of society, who looked upon the Evangelical Alliance as the salvation of the nineteenth century ; and who, to Berthon's horror, Maynard's delight, and the tune of the mob's mingled cheers and groans, dwelt upon the good old rubbish of "England's religious bulwarks," and the heinousness of an atheistical and socialist House of Commons. He would doubtless have pledged Berthon to something more than "our forefathers' glorious principles,"—Mr. Christopher Hope knew very little of our forefathers—and the sealing with his blood of our sacred religious liberties—Fienne called them tyrannies—and many other foggy glories of our ancestors, if the Haddingford electors would have listened to him ; but they would not, although Mr. Hope had a gallant little army of true believers, whose votes were, of course, all going to the constitutional candidate. So the mob yelled, and Mr. Hope, in his black kid gloves, retired, and Maurice Fienne came to the front.

"My good friends," he said, "you know me and my principles so well that I really feel quite at home in addressing you" (of course they did ! hurrah !) "I am not a new comer in this part of the world—the dearest

part to me" (hear, hear);—"nor do I come with new opinions: they have been held by my family for generations, and you have hitherto shared them too" (cheers). "I come forward in obedience to an irresistible impulse—an impulse to serve my country—and to serve it through you; I thought you expected it; my fathers never shrank from the breach at a crisis, and when the gap came, I sprang into it, and this is why I am here to-day, and I am ready to accept your verdict as to whether you want me or no" (great cheering). "My opponent is an honourable man, I have every respect for him" (cheers, groans, and missiles); "but I cannot share his political sympathies; they are not mine, I do not think they are yours: what are they?" (noise). "I had a hazy idea of them before, I am wiser still now—our worthy friend, Mr. Hope, has kindly enlightened us——" Here Fienne was brought to a stop by an indescribable confusion. At the mention of Mr. Hope's name, Mr. Adolphus Spriggs, and his pet lambs, set up a yell, and charged into the crowd, with shouts of "No Bishops," and "Down with the Church Locusts," creating a tumult, whose roar effectually baffled for some time any attempts at speaking on the part of the occupiers of the hustings. At length, partial quiet was restored, and Maurice continued his address. He passed on from the dangerous but telling subject of Mr. Hope, and the Evangelical Alliance, and their mission upon England's bulwarks, to speak of broader political questions. He effectually contrasted the days of old Tory prejudices and Tory legislation, with modern Liberalism and progress; he pointed out the strength of the Ministry and their firm policy of economy and order at home, and non-intervention abroad: he extolled the working-man in

Maynard's best style, and prophesied, amid tremendous cheers, a glorious future for that marvellous genius. Fienne waxed warm over his work; the cheers sent the blood surging through his veins, and he felt violently excited. Lady Nora, at least, should not deny his eloquence: what did that dainty guardsman know of these great questions of vital interest to our country, and our future, which Maurice handled with such power and force of argument? Maynard told him not to exhaust himself. "Electors!" he shouted to the surging crowd, "you know what I think, what I am, and what I mean to do, if you entrust the work to me. You may call me by what name, Radical, Liberal, anything you like; I only know that there is but one Party in England fit to govern—that party I heartily support; it is the party of progress: the elevation of the masses, the extinction of class differences, and the utmost liberty, enlightenment, and happiness to all. That is my programme. It is for you to decide!"

The burst of prolonged applause from the crowd below when Maurice ceased, boded ill to Berthon and his friends; he felt the effect himself, as he stood back among his own people, and he weighed it well. Then he, too, came to the front, and stood face to face with the mob of people. Lilian's heart beat quickly, but her anxious expression soon gave way to a proud smile, when he began his speech. There was an ease and dignity of deportment about Berthon, as he stood at the rail, with one hand thrust into the breast of his frock-coat, after his wont, and that infernal calm in his face and manner which irritated Fienne all the more in that he never could preserve it himself, when speaking, for five minutes together.

Berthon possessed that first and indispensable necessity to good speaking—perfect confidence in himself; he made up his mind beforehand always what he should talk about, but never how he should say it; he knew well enough that when carried away by his own power of words, half-recollected notes would baffle and annoy him. The electors of Haddingford listened; they could not help themselves, in spite of all the Spriggs' faction. There was that in the clear ringing tones of that voice which seems to claim authority over a crowd, and even Maynard forgot to sneer for the moment.

Berthon commenced by thanking them for the great honour they had done him in asking him to stand; then he explained his own motives in accepting the invitation.

"It was not to oppose Mr. Fienne," he said; "Mr. Fienne was not in the field—though I do not say what I should have done under other circumstances. My honourable opponent appears as the supporter of a Liberal creed, and he disavows what he calls a Tory Past; as regards the latter, he was careful not to make Tory synonymous with Whig—for either is equally inconsistent with the political ideas of our day; and as for Mr. Fienne's Liberalism, I am of opinion that it consists of whatever the present parliamentary majority choose to call so" (cheers). "Mr. Fienne supports a party—well and good—but I disclaim a party connection altogether. The Conservative of to-day, let me tell you, was the Liberal of twenty years ago—and the Liberal of to-day is either at one with myself, or he is a Radical" (interruption). "Now then, my friends, the present so-called Liberal majority comprises every shade of political opinion—it

panders to the creed of socialism itself for the sake of party strength : now-a-days, I say, the mildest democratic idea—the very dreams of a half-insane communism call themselves by the name of progressive Liberalism—and this is why I disown the present Liberal party, and find myself opposed to Mr. Fienne” (great cheering, and yells from the yellows, which threatened to put an end to Berthon’s speech). “Now, my friends—let us reckon together,” he shouted above the crowd. “What is Radicalism—and what has it done for you? Who is the working man? I will tell you—he is an Idea—at least, in the mouths of the party to which Mr. Fienne promises allegiance—a stalking-horse for rampant nonsense, which would place the rights of man *as an animal* above every claim of intellect, or education, or honestly-won social position, as regards civilized society. Has the crusade against every existing institution yet procured you your cheap breakfasts and individual prosperity? Where are the promises made to you in the name of this new party? I cannot believe that any thinking rational man among you holds that a professed allegiance to certain abstract ideas can purchase for him one single benefit personally. The blessings of individual happiness depend upon individual exertion, and individual culture is the only true progress—aye, the progress of a nation, my friends, for what is a great nation but an aggregate of great men?” (applause). “I am no upholder of worn-out ideas, because I will not tie my hands to the present. No thorough-going party-man can be thoroughly conscientious: he surrenders his conscience with his right of voting. I will never surrender my individual right of conscience—not even to our modern priest-

hood — Mr. Falkland and his Liberal majority!" (Tremendous uproar).

Then did Berthon denounce in fierce terms the economy which compromised the safety and honour of the country; then did he, to Mr. Hope's infinite disgust, and Maynard's alarm, announce his readiness to favour all reforms, whether social, legal, or ecclesiastical, which were honest in their object and effective in their necessity and scope. Evelyn Maynard watched narrowly Fienne's darkening features, and Mrs. Prideling's party began to tremble, as the people vociferously applauded his scathing irony of the Radical tactics to delude Haddingford. On this occasion Berthon did not flatter a single local weakness. He laid aside his calmness, and gave vent to a most unstatesmanlike, youthful fire, as he concluded his vigorous appeal in these words—

"Away, then, with the political doggel which seeks only to make capital out of the passions and ignorance of the uneducated classes of society! Will you be represented in Parliament by one who is bound hand and foot to the dictates of a clique in the great assembly of the nation? If so, I care for no man's vote. An influential section of you have asked me to fight this battle; I have striven to do it honestly: if you return me, I shall do my best to deserve that great honour, by devoting the energies of my life to the furtherance of those measures which I consider are best calculated to promote your honour, prosperity, and happiness."

When the storm subsided, the show of hands was taken, and declared to be in favour of Mr. Fienne.

CHAPTER XIV.

*"O that a man might know
The end of this day's business ere it come!
But it sufficeth, that the day will end,
And then the end is known."*

JULIUS CÆSAR.

"My dear Arthur, I have a favour to ask of you, a very great favour."

"Well, mother, what is it?"

Over Mrs. Hesketh's face came a look of nervous excitement.

"Arthur!"

"Mother?"

"You will promise me, my dearest boy, that you will stay at home with us to-day?"

"Stay at home!" he exclaimed; "do you know it's polling-day?"

"Well, Arthur, that, at all events, you won't go into Haddingford."

"What on earth are you dreaming of?" said Arthur, who was not unaccustomed to be surprised at his mother's requests.

"I am not dreaming at all," replied Mrs. Hesketh, working herself naturally into a fume; "your Aunt Theresa particularly wishes Mr. Fienne to win the election, and you have done quite enough already against my wishes; if any of the Pridelings should meet you to-day, at work for Mr. Berthon, you will mortally offend your aunt, and we shall never hear the last of it."

If Mrs. Hesketh's little speech had contained nothing

but the repeated reminder to her son that Theresa Prideling was *his* relative, Arthur would have been sufficiently annoyed ; but the idea that his conduct with reference to the election was to be guided by the wishes of a woman whom he rather rudely styled "ignorant and vulgar," thereby bringing out his mother's pocket-handkerchief, was a little too much.

"And who is it your wish should get it?" he asked, smothering his indignation for the moment.

"You know I don't understand these things—and don't care—except that I think Mr. Fienne, being the son of a peer, has the most right ; but I don't expect you to follow my wishes, you never do" (sobs). "You may do whatever you like, as long as you do not offend your aunt."

"Hang my aunt!" said Arthur angrily ; "how dare she interfere with me!—now, mother, what is the good of crying? What people you women are! Look here, it is past nine, and I ought to be in Haddingford."

How Arthur Hesketh converted his weak mother, we will not now stay to enquire ; but the episode will show upon what extraordinary terms the two sisters could be, when the one—and that one the elder of the two—thus made it her first care in life to avoid wounding the insufferable conceit of the other. That Jane Hesketh should place less importance upon the issue of an election than upon the chance of offending her rich relation was to be expected of a weak, foolish woman ; but that her son should sacrifice himself and his duties at the same altar was a supposition so monstrous to that obstinate young man's mind that his mother's last appeal to the fifth commandment was not only entirely lost upon him, but actually

hardened him the more. So, after ineffectual attempts to convince her that her cherished conviction was sheer nonsense, he left her to her sad contemplation of coming disasters, and, with a heavy heart, and vengeance burning against his innocent and excellent aunt, Arthur Hesketh betook himself to the "Old Oak," Haddingford, where Berthon's committee was permanently sitting, and no small excitement was brewing.

In the interval between the day of nomination and the poll, neither side had allowed the grass to grow under their feet. The practical working of our superb constitution was never better exemplified than on the occasion of the Haddingford election. When Berthon challenged the decision of the sheriff at the show of hands, he did so with full knowledge that the tide was setting against him. Although such a staunch supporter of the blue as Mr. William Wittithorne was as sanguine as frequent festive libations could make him at 10 a.m. on the polling-day, to others, and, notably to Mr. Snivel, it began to be pretty evident what the ultimate result would be. The excitement of those few short hours!—short?—a week would more fitly describe them; except, perhaps, to those who worked and who did not in painful suspense reflect, instead. Let us work our way down this narrow side street into the market-place, and see the fun.

"Fienne and Freedom," "Maynard and the Liberty of the People," "Fienne for ever," "Away with social Tyrants," "Falkland and the progress of Democracy;" such were the inscriptions under whose lively auspices a band of some forty British electors, who were evidently more potent in speech than in brains, were,

after recording their own votes in favour of progress *alias* Fienne, and against re-action *alias* Berthon, endeavouring to get up a reign of terror on a small scale, around the principal polling booth.

Ten o'clock pealed from the quiet old church at the side, and there appeared the placard—

FIENNE 157.

BERTHON 113.

The cheers and yells that followed the announcement defy description.

"Keep up your spirits, old man," said Eustace, cheerily, as he quietly lit another weed, in front of the "Old Oak." "These asses will get tired of yelling the other side of one o'clock."

George was thankful, at that moment, even for the society of that bloated aristocrat, whose forefathers had had the misfortune to charge the golden lilies at Agincourt.

It was not to be expected that the Appendix to the Estates of the Realm should not do its little to keep up the row in the Haddingford Election; the Press had worked gallantly on either side to fulfil its supreme function of extolling the Ministerial candidate and libelling his insolent opposer, and vice versâ.

The Lingwoodshire Chronicle and South of England Advertiser, incorporated in 1812 with Barnabas Bembridge's *Journal*, and in 1843 with the *Haddingford Times*, was, we are compelled to say, the most respectable of the penny sheets, although it did support the pretensions of George Berthon, Esq.—"the Tory Protectionist nominee," as the *Haddingford Express and Telegraph* (nobody could say "we" were behind the times, at all events) persisted in calling him. As for

the latter journal, the thermometer of its righteous indignation and libellous insolence went steadily up in the editor's office during the last week of this stormy time, and if the halfpenny-a-liners of Haddingford could have given tangible shape to their printed thunder and lightning, St. Cecily's and its brood would have been long ago overwhelmed in some disastrous calamity. In the present aspect of affairs, the *Lingwoodshire Chronicle, &c.*, having, it may be supposed, some misgiving as to the result of the election, attacked Mr. Maynard, Q.C., with great violence, unconscious that that honourable gentleman never took greater notice of its articles than to light his candles with the spills made thereout in his quiet sanctum at Fienne House. Foreseeing the result of the election, then, the spirit of the defunct Barnabas Bembridge in its columns did give mysterious hints of a Petition, already, and charged "the Radical crew" with imposture and bribery on a grand scale. The *Telegraph*, having no dignity to lose, brought great guns into action, and the heat of party spirit that was raging at the time, and the fear of provoking more serious consequences than aching shoulders to Mr. Nicholas Ambush, alone prevented Berthon from horsewhipping that venomous little attorney, for the insinuation, in big type, that his candidature was entirely owing to drawing-room intrigues between the Lady Lilian and her family in Town.

It is the *Express-Telegraph* partisans who are reigning for the time in the market-place, for it is nearly noon, and Berthon has pulled up some five and twenty votes—reason enough for instituting mob law against the Blues. If the battle was to be typified by the engagement between poor Mr. Biddigood, the school-

master and champion of the church, and fellow elect of Mr. Hope—whose vote Lord Lisle had so fraudulently cavilled for on a certain morning—and the Radical roughs who hooted him very rapidly home, Fienne's victory was assured.

The announcement at twelve o'clock of Fienne's committee, was—

FIENNE 324.

BERTHON 299.

And, according to constitutional usage, it was contradicted by the "Old Oak" committee's return, of—

BERTHON 301.

FIENNE 320.

One o'clock came, and both sides had made about thirty more votes each; notwithstanding Fienne's majority, his committee, for reasons of their own, did not think him safe. The more beer that was consumed the more noise there was without, and the number of impromptu orators in various parts of the town increased.

"Whatever happens," said Maynard to Maurice, when the two o'clock return appeared, "meet me here at 3 p.m. I believe they have given it up, but I have secured your majority *irrespective of that*." With this significant intimation the great lawyer left the room, and betook himself to his congenial audiences in the High Street, where he congratulated the electors upon the now certain return of whom he had the audacity to term "the working-man's candidate." The return of which he spoke was—

FIENNE 405.

BERTHON 382.

Meanwhile the opposition were not idle. Harley Grey left a heated debate at the committee-rooms to carry the two o'clock return up to St. Cecily's. Of that debate and its issue there will be something more to say shortly. It was pleasant to get out of the uproar into the quiet lanes for a time ; as he left the centre of the town, the crowd lessened, and the only signs of the great events that were passing were the small and noisy groups at the corners of the streets, and the number of messengers going and returning, whither no man could tell, and, from the frequent potations of the mounted envoys themselves, it was a marvel that they knew either.

Harley, who thought the fight over, as concerned his friend, was trotting quietly up the hill, when, as fate would have it, he met once more Miss Evelyn Maynard, who was also riding, but this time alone, with an attendant. She was going in the direction of the town, she said, to see something of the fun ; Mr. Cranburn had promised to meet her and escort her to her father's quarters.

"It is going entirely in your favour," Harley says, in answer to her inquiry of the state of the poll.

"*My* favour ?" replies Miss Maynard with feigned surprise.

"Your father's, I mean."

"I did not know my father was a candidate, Mr. Grey. Pray, how do you know whose side I favour ?"

"Mr. Fienne's, of course."

"I don't see the 'of course,' " she says, with an ironical curl of her full red lip.

"Will you tell me then, Miss Maynard, who *has* the honour of your favour ?"

"Honour !" exclaimed the young lady contemptu-

ously, "why don't you say, the absurdity, Mr. Grey? What does it matter who has, seeing it is worth nothing—and that is why you men make a compliment of it—sheer flattery, Mr. Grey, nothing else."

"I never flatter," responds Harley, with a quick flash in his eyes which are riveted, as if by a spell, on the beautiful defiant face before him.

She laughs lightly.

"I am bound to believe you, of course, if you say so; but *entre nous*, Mr. Grey, although I know nothing about politics, I cordially detest Radicals."

"For what reason?"

"I do not see how a democrat can be a gentleman."

"But many gentlemen are democrats; besides Miss Maynard, your fa——"

"You may be right," she interrupts, with a hasty movement of the small gloved hand that held the riding whip; "let us leave the paradox: are *you* a Radical, Mr. Grey?"

"I leave that to you," he replies laughing. Miss Maynard feels uncomfortable under the involuntary earnestness of Harley's look. "You seem to me," he adds, "to place considerably less value, yourself, upon the dispensing of your favour, than some others would, either as regarded their cause or themselves."

"Some others in the masculine gender, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

With a little scornful laugh she prefaces the quotation—

*"And what is woman that we sell
Honour and truth of word and deed,
For smiles for which we have no need,
To lie to the lies they tell?"*

Do you know where that comes from, Mr. Grey?" Harley starts and colours. To be convicted out of his own mouth, and that by Miss Evelyn Maynard was the very last thing he expected.

"You must not identify me with that, without the context," he says hurriedly; "besides, when I wrote that, I had never seen Miss Maynard smile."

The rich hue of her cheek deepens visibly; it is not unpleasant, neither the words, nor the voice, but she thinks it time to part.

"Mind then," she says gaily, "that in your next volume, you correct yourself and us; however, Mr. Grey, now you know that Mr. Fienne's canvass is not favoured by me."

"And, *e converso*?" he replies, as he takes the stretched-out hand in farewell.

"Mr. Harley Grey is welcome to it," she lightly laughs again. "I am sure Mr. Berthon will thank you."

Another "cross-lightning" between her eyes and his, and the beautiful flirt rides away.

When Harley had delivered his news at St. Cecily's, and reached Haddingford once more, important events had happened. The matter was simply this: the leading spirits of Berthon's committee, with the exception of one or two personal friends, had come to the conclusion that the only way to avert inevitable defeat was the immediate step of securing for money certain neutral votes which were still *in the market*.

"It's merely a matter of fifteen or twenty pounds," says one of them in an excited whisper to George; "you won't throw to the dogs the efforts of the whole party for that?"

"I would give double that sum not to have it men-

tioned again," replied Berthon, "I fight no one's battle but my own; I have not compromised the party by one single act; in the first place, I have all along stated that I would be bound by no party ties whatever; in the second, I merely ask them not to compromise me."

"Now, now, Mr. Berthon," says Snivel, coaxingly, "don't ruin everything, and make your life a misery, sir, pray don't, over such a trifle. Lor bless you, Mr. Berthon, they *all* do it."

"Gentlemen!" says George, turning hastily from his agent, without a word, to those in the room (if Fienne could have seen him at the moment, he would for once, at least, have seen him violently agitated), "I am sorry for the event; but I will not sanction this, not if half-a-sovereign would win the election; it is not so much a question with me of political morality, but one of personal honour."

At that moment a great noise in the street attracted their attention; amid loud shouts and yells, a messenger burst into the house, and the room, with the three o'clock return, which was posted outside, and carried about among the excited crowd—

BERTHON 441.

FIENNE 441.

The Liberals returned—

FIENNE 446.

BERTHON 440.

It was difficult to believe it; but Berthon knew that many in Haddingford would hang back till the last to see how the struggle went; and the majority of the neutrals were likely to vote one way or the

other, if they failed to make an honest bargain out of an otherwise to them, useless commodity. Besides, the return of Fienne's committee proved that the race was neck and neck ; and, as the number of registered votes was 950, all hope was not yet over.

We leave him in the wooden balcony of the "Old Oak," endeavouring to make his voice once more heard below, amid a tumult of the most orthodox constitutional kind, whilst we seek Fienne.

The Radical partner in the firm of Messrs. Snivel and Bark, was more fortunate in his patron than the other. Mr. Josiah Bark had mainly to deal with Mr. John Maynard, and they were known of old to each other. Nods, and winks, and pass-words did the business, which it took all poor Mr. Snivel's eloquence to explain the necessity of, to Mr. Berthon.

Making his way from a successful visit to some modest voter in an obscure part of the town, towards Mr. Fienne's committee rooms, Mr. Bark suddenly found himself hemmed hopelessly in a crowd, who were cheering some object, man, or beast—whom Mr. Bark, being small, could not see—vociferously. Elbowing his way, weasel-like, towards the centre of attraction, he reached the vicinity of an empty beer-cask, perched upon whose summit was his friend, Mr. Adolphus Spriggs, who, with much jest, was "working 'em up," as he called it, with a most delectable harangue.

"Men of Haddingford !" said, or rather shouted Mr. Spriggs, "will you let the country go to the dogs without moving a finger ? will you let a priest-ridden, parson-ridden, church-ridden" (Mr. Spriggs called this alliteration, and the mob cheered vigorously) "people be trodden into the dust by a beastly aristocracy ?

Then, damn it! sirs, why do you return the paid nominee of a rotten oligarchy?"—"Hoo-ray! hoo-ray!"—"Down with the locusts who monopolize everything! Support the Government, I say, and force 'em to legislate for—for—" ("Go it, Spriggs!") "the working classes!" (cheers). "Who is it rules the country?—why, You—the People! You are the majority—and yet you return—will you return—a Tory lawyer?"—"No, no!" "Then keep 'em from the poll—anything!—save the Republic, gentlemen—I mean—the——"

Here an unconscionable and brutal Tory levelled, with unerring aim, the body of a kitten, drowned for the sake of the ammunition, straight at the head of the great Spriggs; his sudden descent from the tub might be typical of the fall of his—Mr. Spriggs'—Republic; at all events, it gave his half-drunken hearers an excuse for a real British electioneering yell, and, happily for this other Friend of the People, at the same moment he was touched on the shoulder by an envoy of Mr. Maynard's, who desired his presence immediately. So Mr. Spriggs, dimmed in outward beauty, but nowise daunted in heart, left the eternal cause of Democracy, and the dead kitten, behind him, and betook himself, in company with Josiah Bark, to the secret chamber, where Maynard was impatiently awaiting him.

It was certainly a time for action rather than words.

"I thought this would happen," said Maynard to Fienne, who, pale and anxious, was sitting mutely at the table, utterly exhausted by his efforts at speaking to the crowd.

"You see Berthon is a man of energy, and your

cousin's long lethargy has provoked a revolt which we could only heal by identifying him—Berthon—with the old Tories. It seems that they cannot, or will not, do this, and hence this hard running. However, my dear fellow, I have a card left which will put everything right before four o'clock. Hallo, there! is Spriggs come?"

When away from Fienne, Maynard indulged his real feeling more undisguisedly. He was incipiently savage.

Spriggs came. The great man took him aside, and a few sentences merely passed between them.

"You are quite sure this is right?"

"Quite. Oh! Mr. Maynard, if I hadn't lost that 'ere paper!"

"Never mind the cursed paper!" said Maynard angrily; "it is illegible by this time. Now be off, Spriggs, and bring them in by the quarter."

Spriggs the tub-orator, and Spriggs the domestic animal, were two very different beings; beneath his highly-spiced volubility and brave attire was a very ordinary heart and disposition, and Mr. Spriggs would have much preferred annihilating over again the opposition of the oligarchy and aristocrats from his post of 'vantage in the corner of the market-place, to engaging in the one eminently practical step towards their overthrow upon which he was now bent.

He did not leave the house unobserved. Five minutes' conversation between Arthur Hesketh and Berthon had resulted in the appointment of two mean-spirited rascals to watch the actions of the ex-American citizen. Young Hesketh himself was very wide-awake on the same trail; so it chanced that Mr. Spriggs' journey to the other end of Haddingford

was not made alone. Hesketh, having laid his own plans, now dispensed with the spies, and followed his friendly publican himself.

The great Adolphus was making his way up a narrow, tortuous passage, towards a low tavern on the outskirts of the town, from whose open door and windows could be already heard the voices of a number of men, apparently as gruff as they were noisy, when he caught the—to him at that moment—awful sound of footsteps behind him. A hand laid upon his shoulder sent his patriotic heart at one bound into his mouth.

“Lor’, Mr. Hesketh! what——”

“Spriggs!” exclaimed that young man, with a voice and manner quite strange to him, “here’s something belonging to you which you may want,” and he held forth before the eyes of poor Spriggs the precious document he had picked up in Denham Wood. “Look here, Mr. Spriggs—if you attempt to bribe those voters, you will be *criminally prosecuted!*”

“Oh! Lord, Mr. Hesketh, you wouldn’t go and ruin a poor emigrant!” exclaimed Adolphus, as the awful prospect caused him to quake from head to foot. Precious moments! they flew like lightning. A desperate courage seized Spriggs.

“What business have you to stop me, Mr. Hesketh? talking of bribery to an innocent man! Good heavens! I’ve only got five minutes! Look you here, Master Arthur, if you interfere with my progress, I guess it’ll come to a stand-up fight ’twixt us two.”

Arthur looked quite equal to the task; but he only laughed.

"You are free to go where you like, Spriggs ; so am I."

In vain did Spriggs swear in the true almighty fashion—first at his enemy, then at Maynard, and lastly at his 'tarnation luck.

"Well, and where's the tip?" said a rough voice at hand. "Now then, Mr. Spriggs, I've been a waitin' in this 'ere 'ole two hours—d—d if I hav'n't!—and Bill Stocks too; now then, fork up, or I'll be hanged if I don't go and vote for Mr. Burnton."

Here was a dilemma! The three-quarters pealed from the church tower, like the strokes of doom.

"Who talks of tipping?" gasped the ill-fated Spriggs; "who talks of intimidation or brib—"

Hesketh burst into a roar of laughter, and the visitor began to see through the matter.

"You're a parcel of skin-flinting, hypocritical rascals!" said the balked briber, "now then—just you go and tell that to your committee: I've thought so all along, and I'll be jolly well blowed if I don't vote for Burnton!"

Alas! for the strange coincidences of life! Had Maynard not held that important conference with Spriggs in the Denham Wood,—if only not upon that afternoon—if Arthur Hesketh had not been in love—if there had been no assignation—or an assignation elsewhere—if——; but the "if's" would go on for ever, and not help Spriggs out of his difficulty. If the disreputable carpenter of Haddingford, who had just given his opinion of Mr. Fienne's august committee, had, in concert with the publican and his other friends, demolished Hesketh—something might have been done to save the Republic—but unfortunately Mr. Hesketh was both straight and tall, and had a reputa-

tion for hitting uncomfortably hard when he was so minded, and there were the consequences to come! In Crowdingham the demolition of those fatal six feet of humanity would have been patriotic and comparatively easy—but in Haddingford it was another matter. Now the carpenter was only one out of a list of fifteen neutrals against whose names the ‘tips’ were written; he had gone off to vote for “Burnton,” and more than five minutes had flown. As for Spriggs, in his “almighty fix,” he was incapable of reflection or action, for the sight of Hesketh’s “duplicate” was a veritable *diabolus ex machinâ*—and paralysed him. In a desperate moment, Spriggs claimed Arthur’s protection, or rather, the Berthonites’ against Maynard: the former tore up the paper in Spriggs’ presence, and at 3.55 p.m. left the unhappy man free to dispense his sovereigns to such of the neutrals as he could still find.

The crowd in the market-place was enormous; one wondered where on earth they came from. From the windows of the “Eagle” Maynard endeavoured to descry the return of Adolphus Spriggs from his quest. Poor Spriggs! at that moment, he would have willingly given five years lease of government to the most beastly aristocracy that could be devised—to have been delivered from his position. To have indignantly to deny any intention of any approach to bribery in the very presence of the scoundrels whom he had sought for the purpose of bribing, was utterly beyond his power of a “double entendre,” and was fatal.

The great Prideling faction was confident of victory. After Theresa’s untiring exertions—and after Samuel’s repeated cheques—not to speak of the process of a well-

known kind, and on a grand scale, to secure the votes of his many tenants for Fienne, it was not to be wondered at that victory was secured.

Four o'clock! A hush seemed to fall immediately upon the crowd; and then amid an uproar indescribable there appeared the announcement:

BERTHON 452.

FIENNE 449.

The result of the election was scarcely to be believed at the "Old Oak." Mr. William Wittithorne behaved as a successful prophet should. It was said that the conduct of Mr. John Maynard, M.P., was of a slightly violent description; but something must be allowed to the famous Queen's Counsel, who perhaps of all men had lost most by the issue. Bribery of a most disgraceful—and intimidation of the most audacious—character, was of course the reason of Berthon's unexpected success; but the scenes at the Villa Dante can be so easily conjectured that we need not spy on poor Theresa's mortification in our hasty leave of Haddingford. It was well, perhaps, for Arthur Hesketh that he returned before the week was over to his London office and two rooms in Bloomsbury.

Fienne bore his defeat with more dignity. In his last speech from the hustings he was perhaps a little sarcastic, but he did not care to parade before a fickle crowd what he really felt.

As for that crowd, where red had been, and yellow, now blue reigned—except with the real politicians amongst them—of whom, despite the magic of the franchise, there were not more than are usually to be found. Perhaps it was a fact that even a section of the more thoroughgoing Rads were not altogether

displeased that the spell of the aristocratic quasi-democracy of the great House of Fienne was for the first time in twenty years broken.

The first person whom Berthon met when he reached St. Cecily's, was Bob Smythe.

"Well, Master George,—and how's the day gone?"

"I am a Member of Parliament, Bob," said Berthon, with much the same expression of face and voice as that with which he had announced to that same individual, once upon a time, the fact that he had brought with him from Harrow the prize for Greek composition.

Then followed the congratulation. "But," added Berthon, "I cannot help feeling sorry for Mr. Maurice, Bob."

"Well, sir," replied he, "you have licked him at the first go in—now, Master George—look out!"

"Licked whom—Fienne?" asked Berthon, laughing at the man's gravity.

"Maynard—John Maynard—whom else should I mean, Mr. Berthon? you've put the bee in the tar-pot, sir—and he'll neither forget nor forgive."

When the stars were out that night, and the last drunken elector had reeled home—or given up the attempt, with philosophical resignation, upon the road—there might be said to have been two individuals of all the actors of that day who did not care to seek repose.

John Maynard had talked sophistry to Maurice for an hour, consumed a bottle and a half of claret, looked out his train on the morrow, and retired to rest. But Fienne walked on the terrace in the moonlight, and smoked cigar after cigar in solitude. Had he been successful, he would have forgiven Berthon

the contest ; but he was not, and he cursed the whole affair bitterly. From that hour he chose his lot with Maynard, though he disliked him ; first, because he could assist him to get into parliament for another place ; secondly, because he hated George Berthon.

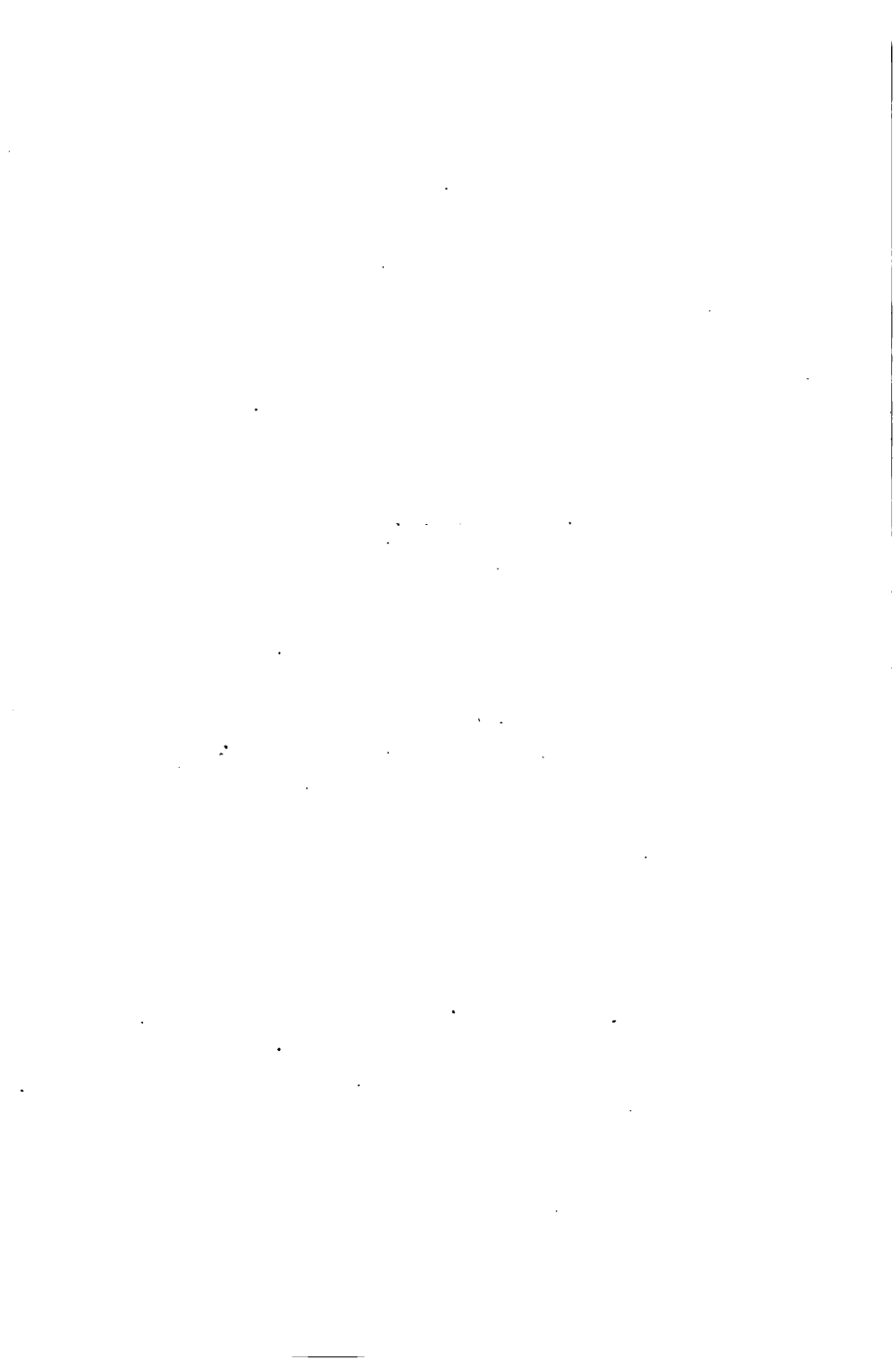
"It was Landon's money," whispered Maynard, and that was the text of his broodings. As for Nora Celadon, he vowed that he would reckon with Berthon if he failed to win her in marriage.

At St .Cecily's, Harley Grey sat at the open window of his bed-room, and watched the still and lovely landscape, thinking—thinking—thinking. Was it a dream ? George Berthon, his early friend—his colleague, not only married to his loved ideal—but already a member of that assembly of which they had so often spoken—as a goal in the dim far future ? Now was to come the breaking up, and the parting ; another divergence of the ways. Ah ! Evelyn Maynard ! it is thy face that comes out in the gloom : the poet's lips move as if to address her. Will he ever see her again ? There comes no answer, but the wind blowing beneath the hush of the stars !

BOOK III.

*" The World is fill'd with folly and sin,
And Love must cling where it can, I say :
For Beauty is easy enough to win,
But one is not loved every day."*

THE WANDERER.



CHAPTER I.

"A man's mind is sometime wont to tell him more than seven watchmen that sit above in an high tower."

ECCLESIASTICUS.

IT was one of the last days of February, and winter seemed to make itself more thoroughly at home in London every hour ; the afternoon sun was shining cheerfully through the frosty air upon the human tide which rolled sluggishly up and down Piccadilly. Parliament, for the consideration of divers very urgent and important matters, had opened very early this year ; and to all outward appearance there seemed to be a sort of winter season going on amongst those some hundred thousand Babylonians who are mythically styled the Upper Ten.

There is a certain private hotel in Dover Street, from some of whose windows the ebb and flow of the tide could be watched, both up and down that most respectable and favourite thoroughfare, which, if only every five hundred yards of it were not characteristically set at a different angle, would be a very fine street indeed. Shall we ever draw a straight line, or a fairly accurate curve, in the matter of our street architecture ? I am afraid that those of us who are old will have to leave such a wild dream to our children's children. Let us go back to the hotel.

In one of those small, but cosily-furnished rooms, then, whose look-out has been touched upon—a room whose comfort in fire, and furniture, and ventilation, silences for an hour or two the growls and grumbles of the inveterate Islander on his return from the continental wanderings he imagines he has so fondly enjoyed—was, not a lady, I am sorry to say, but a middle-aged gentleman, and all alone. He was standing with his back to the fire-place, with a coat-tail under each arm, looking across the apartment out of the window, with a sort of Horatian complacency, which might have been idleness or contentment, upon his very English and very aristocratic-looking countenance. Heaven knows in how many instances “my lord” resembles a costermonger rather than an aristocrat!—blood and nature won’t agree; but in this instance, perverse waiters, and foreigners of all descriptions, when he was abroad, would give our plain “Mr.”—before they learnt the name—a peerage in spite of himself. He might have been five feet ten, but not more, though a slight, well-made figure seemed to add to the height which corpulency would have detracted from. When women met him for the first time in their lives they would sometimes exclaim, “What a *charming* face!” and charming in their sense—and not handsome—was the best description of it. When the beauty of the human face consists mainly of expression, it is simply absurd to endeavour to give an idea of it by a catalogue of adjectived features.

I will only say that our friend’s expression was noble and thoughtful; that a somewhat stern mouth could relax at will into a smile which gave sweetness to a dignity altogether manly; that the deep-set, brilliant eyes were quiet English grey—and that what

had been in youth profuse dark and curly hair, about the broad, intellectual forehead, was now changing to its winter hue.

The door of the apartment was open, and in the adjoining chamber could be seen, upon the floor, a large travelling trunk, whose contents had very recently been disturbed, in order to extract the books and papers, most of which were lying pell-mell above and around it. Writing materials were upon the table of the sitting-room, and the ink was scarcely dry upon the addresses of a number of letters; a pair of eye-glasses lying upon the *Times* in the easy-chair by the fire-place showed that an Englishman's daily duty in that respect also had been attended to.

The gentleman pulled out his watch, and consulted again a note that lay open upon the table; then he rang the bell, and resumed his study of Piccadilly.

"Have the goodness to take those letters, and see they are posted for me this evening; there are eight of them, and they are all important; kindly be careful as to the number. I am expecting a visitor immediately, so you may bring candles; show the gentleman straight up to me, and do not let me be disturbed whilst he is here."

The man bowed and retired, unable to make the commentary he dearly loved. The high wax candles, in their old-fashioned silver Ionic columns, duly arrived, and he was once more left alone. In the space of about five minutes the door opened again, and, preceded by his card upon the waiter, at which the occupant of the room just glanced to satisfy himself as to the identity, the visitor entered.

A tall, raw-boned individual he was, when divested of his cloak, bound with fur, in which his person was

enveloped ; a sallow-complexioned face, eagle features, and thin locks of grey hair had he. But there was that about him—in the eye, and voice, and manner—which seemed to betoken he might be somebody. And somebody he undoubtedly was.

The two men greeted one another as if they were friends, long parted. Many questions were mutually asked and answered before either relapsed into their respective chairs *vis-à-vis* by the hearth. By-and-bye he of the sable cloak extracted from the recesses of his breast-pocket a sealed letter, and held it in his hand, it may be presumed, as a text for the conversation which followed.

"My letters you have of course received," begins the visitor, "or I should not have been here now?"

"Certainly ; I have to thank you much for them. They were of great interest to me. I thought you would like to see me as soon as possible, so I sent you a note immediately."

"May I hope that you have considered their contents?"

"As regards myself? I have certainly done so— anxiously and carefully."

"Well—do you hold us out any hope?"

The other shakes his head with a somewhat mournful smile ; the countenance of his visitor falls, and he hastened to add—

"My dear friend, I cannot tell you how much I feel that I owe you for all you have thought and done. I can assure you that I feel most flattered—far more, indeed, than my poor abilities deserve ; but it is too late now for me to think of beginning life over again."

"You are ten years younger than I am ; you cannot

be in earnest. This letter is from Falkland himself; he asked me this morning, after the Council, whether a few lines from him could at all add to the weight of the considerations I myself had urged."

His listener takes the letter, breaks the seal, and glances his eye over the contents.

"The most I ask of you to-day," the other proceeds, as his friend, with a slight nervous tremor in his hand, refolds the note, "is that you will promise me not to give your final reply till you have considered Falkland's proposition."

"It seems the very height of egotism—selfish and unreasonable—in me to say it," he replies, "but, though I will certainly accede to your request, I cannot hold out the remotest chance of my changing my decision."

"Will you give me your reasons?"

"The principal ones?—yes. If I succeeded in gaining a seat, such support as I could render you would be looked upon with the greatest suspicion; a place in the Cabinet would, as far as I can see, weaken rather than strengthen you. Again, it would be a departure from my life-long policy; and lastly, I could not honestly support Falkland's views. As regards myself personally, to tell you the truth, although I am at the present moment, thank God, in the enjoyment of tolerable health, I do not feel equal to the anxiety and toil of public life. My dear Surrey, consider how many others you have to choose from."

"I do not disguise from you," returns the other, "that what you say is a great disappointment to me: though I admit candidly that you yourself have never given the slightest colour to my hopes. Speaking to you in confidence here, I feel every day our hold on

the country lessening. The loss of the Haddingford election in the autumn, though a small matter——”

“Pardon my interruption for one moment. Why do you call that election a loss to you?”

“Young Fienne would have been certain to stand with Falkland; we had his word: Mr. Berthon, who, I have no reason to doubt, is perfectly conscientious in his independent support, will, I feel sure, join Stanforde and Dupré.”

“Well?”

“I was going to say that the loss of that election was a gain to the *tiers parti*, and that is our danger. We do not stand well with the Church—you would, if you would take office, restore some confidence; and as long as Freemantle holds the Home Office that is impossible. I think it certain he will shortly take the Chiltern, and as Sir Joseph intends to retire, nothing would be easier for you than to get in for Rington.”

“I will reply to your first remark first. If you have lost the *tiers parti*, as you now call it, is it not what I have long pointed out to you? You are right: you cannot amalgamate the views of such men as Stanforde, Scott, and Dupré, with the ignorant leaders of the mob, whom Falkland has for some unaccountable reason called to his right hand of late. A year and a half ago, I saw that he was acting rather on some secret, and, I trust, fallible horoscope of the future, than according to his own once sound appreciation of the lessons of history and contemporaneous political experience. Again, you speak of the Church: have you not wilfully alienated it? I do not honestly see how there could be any *rapprochement* between a Bishop Huntley and Falkland’s ideal working-man, such as Prowlett. I ask you honestly, has he not

rather courted the latter for his fancied political power, or rather as a significant sign of the times, than the powerful intellect, if, I admit, narrow in its working, of such a churchman as Huntley? You wince: I do not mean to hurt your feelings, but this is my matured opinion. To revert to myself: I do not think I should gain the confidence of ecclesiastics. Though I appreciate the power and importance of the Church, I am too well known in connection with those who have sharply criticised, to the verge of open hostility, its constitution and abuses. I have said more than I intended; but I speak to a friend. I do not think the ministry wise in favouring at this time *proléttaire* doctrines, and my five and twenty years' independence would end strangely indeed in throwing myself now into the designs of Falkland. I have the greatest admiration for his genius, I honour his undoubted sincerity, but I do not agree with him. But this is beside the question. I have eschewed a public career: I am truthfully no longer fitted for it. I have not the requisite ambition; and besides, my friend, you know that my work, such as is left in me, lies in other spheres."

At the conclusion of this speech his visitor remained for a time silent. He seemed to recover his wandering thoughts with a sigh, and he said—

"Thank you for your confidence. My own lot is cast: nor do I shrink from its fulfilment. But we will not pursue the subject further now."

Yet it was not till half-an-hour later that the tall, thin figure in the white silk hat and furred cloak stepped across the narrow pavement into the brougham which was waiting for him. The result of that farther conversation will be best shown in the following letter,

which, after his visitor's departure, and an hour's musing over the fire, his host sat down to write in his room at the Dover Street Hotel :—

"London, February 27, 18—.

"MY DEAR SURREY,

"Putting aside for the moment the fact of your being a member of the Government, I write to you as an old and valued friend. I will thank you to convey to Mr. Falkland my appreciation of the compliment he pays me in venturing the hope that I would seek the suffrages of my countrymen for a seat in Parliament, and of the great honour he does me in laying any value on my possible future co-operation in a ministerial capacity.

"I cannot but regret that I do not personally see my way toward the fulfilment of these kind and flattering hopes. It is quite true that my poor abilities have at all times had a political bias ; but, for many years, I have totally resigned the idea of a public career for myself. It is a sufficient honour and responsibility to me that I enjoy a personal acquaintance with eminent men of more than one party, who, from time to time, have the actual administration of affairs in their hands ; as regards the outside world, I am known to them in my writings, and, whatever the influence may be that I can exercise, many public and private reasons combine to forbid that I should now ever endeavour to do so in a new capacity.

"I have no desire to enter upon a novel and untried field of action ; indeed, I am not now equal to the task.

"Even if all this were changed, I deeply regret that in the present condition of public affairs I could not

give an undivided and honest support to the Government—powerful as Mr. Falkland's may be. Under the pressure of the need of the time, its strength has in it two elements, which, when that pressure ceases—and there are signs of it now—will at the same time cease to operate in the same direction. Ideal democracy is one thing; its practical form in England at the present moment is quite another. The power of the Intellectual Minority in direct legislation must decrease in proportion as a fictitious intellectual value is put upon the result of a count of heads of an ignorant majority. I do consider that Mr. Falkland's Government owes too much of its popularity to an assumed union of ideas and practical *intentions* between its own undoubted weight and influence, and the current sophisms of a half-educated people, which I should indeed tremble for England to see for one day in actual power. I shall never cease, notwithstanding, to sympathise with Mr. Falkland in his great efforts for those noble ends which we all have in common.

“Very faithfully yours,

“GREVILLE LANDON.

“His Grace the Duke of Surrey, K.G., &c., &c.,
Reform Club.”

CHAPTER II.

*"My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
Not decked with diamonds and Indian stones,
Nor to be seen : my crown is called content ;
A crown it is, that seldom kings enjoy."*

KING HENRY VI.

MR. LANDON sat at breakfast on the following morning with the pleasant consciousness of having got over a delicate and difficult task to his own satisfaction. If men of fifty do not profess that heroic contempt for the world's opinion which enthusiastic youth is permitted to boast of, they do not, at all events, trouble themselves so easily at that world's misconstruction of their words and actions.

It was certainly to be wondered at that a man in the prime of life, with the social position, the reputed brilliant talents, and the great wealth of Mr. Landon should decline the tempting honours and responsibilities of a public career. Perhaps he preferred a graceful ease. Society said so, and condemned him at the bar of its opinion. I do not know what penalty was inflicted, but it is possible that a ladies' committee would have let him off with a wife—for Mr. Landon was not married. Could such a thing be tolerated as for a respectable middle-aged gentleman to enjoy in single blessedness an unembarrassed income of thirty thousand a year? What has he to say? I am afraid it was not complimentary to the ladies' committees to hint that the impertinence of society is always in proportion to its ignorance of the subjects on which it takes upon itself to form an opinion.

So Mr. Landon refused to be a cabinet minister, and eat his breakfast in peace. The visit on the previous evening of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs had inspired the waiter—who had not been so long acquainted with the Dover Street hotel as Mr. Greville Landon—with a certain amount of awe in that gentleman's presence. When Mr. Landon summoned him, after his breakfast, he wondered what great commands might not issue out of the pocket-book in which he was hunting when he appeared.

"Bring me from your file the *Times* of the 27th, 28th, and 29th of December last," said Mr. Landon.

They were brought, and he searched the list of births. Here it was at last, in the paper of the 28th. The notice which he caught was as follows :

"On the 26th inst., at — Park Lane, Lady Lilian, the wife of George Berthon, Esq., M.P., of the Inner Temple, barrister-at-law, of a son."

Mr. Landon read it several more times than were necessary to grasp its meaning ; and, as he read it, the smile of a deep conscious satisfaction passed over the grave, handsome face. By-and-bye he wrote a note and sent it round to Park Lane.

It was about six o'clock that Saturday afternoon, when George Berthon emerged from the cold mist beneath the arch of Constitution Hill, into the light and noise of Hyde Park Corner. He did not need the shivering assertion of the poor wretch who begged beneath the arch-way, under the guise of a half-empty box of fusees, that the night was miserably cold. He started from his slow-paced reverie, thanked God for his great-coat, and stepped briskly across the road. To be in such a brown study, after sixteen months of

matrimony, as to start to the sudden consciousness of being a married man, was a strange proceeding on the part of Bob Smythe's Master George. Nevertheless, he was so wrapt up in the thoughts of old days that he nearly turned up Piccadilly towards his old quarters. I am afraid he would have had a very rude awakening on hunting up those once luxurious bachelor's chambers.

Ah! what a thing it is to feel the magnetism of love! We certainly do view with an epicurean complacency the prospect of the cheerful fire, the cosy arm-chair, the absorbing book, and the well-beloved cigar, that await us at our rooms somewhere. But what a gulf exists between that mortal satisfaction and the deep inner consciousness, as we leave the thronging crowds of men and thread our way through the unknown mass of human animals homewards, that somewhere in that great city's life there beats one loving, waiting heart in unison with our longing for the sight of the one little face, the sound of the one sweet voice, and the touch of the clinging kisses, we have sold the world to gain.

George Berthon was no saint; it was an involuntary shudder on his part when the thought flashed upon him that night, as he looked down the long, lighted, crowded street, up which he knew his way so well, of what the world and its folly had to give to the hearts who came with the wild longing for love to the decked booths of its merry fair.

So he passed up the sweep of the drive, and came into Park Lane, and to the door of the house which had been Mr. Landon's, and was now his.

It was a great trial to our M.P.'s fingers to get his latch-key into the lock, but when once inside the

house, Horace himself could not have felt more serenely contented with his lot. Soft carpets, bright light, and perfect silence : but where was the little queen who reigned there ? George reduced the bulk of his outward man, and went in search of her.

Not in the dining or drawing rooms, not in her bedroom, or even in her little sacred boudoir upstairs, was Lilian, but in Berthon's study. Ah ! that was something like a room ! He paused for a moment between the double doors where the pale blue vase of the Greek lamp hung, and pushing open that wonderful baize screen—through whose thickness, not even the screams of the heir of the house of Berthon, or indeed of any number of heirs, could ever penetrate—he found her.

Almost lost in the armchair, with her toes upon the fender, the shaded light of the reading lamp just touching the soft outline of the sweet face, is Lilian. There is very little to be heard of her exclamation of surprise and delight at his coming, as he folds her in his arms, and kisses her lips and forehead. One would really imagine they were just engaged, from the number of kisses he gives her. So they are, for George Berthon's life has stood still ever since that autumn evening in the garden at King's Lisle.

"How late you are, darling !" she says as he kneels at the fire by her side, and she rubs his cold hands in her little soft warm ones.

"I am so sorry, Lilian, I could not come home to-day ; I gave the beggars my Saturday afternoon for their arbitration case, and the consequence is that, instead of its being over at three, as I thought it would, they kept me in Victoria Street till now. By Jove ! though, little pet, I am so thankful it is Saturday :

fancy having to be off to the House such a night as this !”

What a boy he is still ! They look into each other's eyes, and laugh like gleeful children. There are many worse things in the world than the prospect of a cosy winter evening in the society of one sweet girl. *Is* Lilian not a girl ? Look at her face and listen to her.

“George ! I have a note for you in my work-box. I don't think, though, I shall let you open it.”

“Why ?”

“Promise me first, darling—won't you ?—that you won't go, if it's to take you out again to-night ?”

“If it *is* to take me out, I do not think my promise would be worth much : whom is it from, little one ?”

She holds the envelope reversed in the light of the lamp, and contemplates the seal.

“Why, that is the Landon crest !” he exclaims, looking over her hand at the dragon gardant he knows so well.

“Good gracious George ! you don't mean to say Mr. Landon is in London ? and perhaps it's to say he is coming to dinner !” she adds in a voice of instinctive anguish.

“Well, and what if he is ?” says her husband, with exasperating coolness, and in entire ignorance of the tremendous issues involved, or he would not be opening the note so stupidly slowly.

“No !” she says angrily, as he asks her whether she wants the monogram and crest.

What a strange anger is that which is met with a laugh and a kiss !

He reads—

"London, Feb. 28, 18—

"MY DEAR GEORGE,—

"I have just returned from Italy ; my journey was so unexpectedly sudden—I did not intend coming home till May—that I had not the opportunity of writing to you. I shall take my chance of finding you at home on Sunday afternoon ; it is of no use your looking me up before then. My warmest love to your wife, and,—I suppose I must add,—her boy !

"Affectionately yours,

"GREVILLE LANDON."

"Boy indeed ! For Heaven's sake, wait till he's a rational animal !" says George irreverently. Lilian pouts and blushes, and sends him upstairs to dress for dinner. Whilst he is gone she reads the note again and again, and finds her hand tremble so much that she can scarcely see the writing.

Lilian thinks that George will never have done eating. When a man becomes an M.P. he ought really to be more mindful of his position. He is very tyrannical too in his own house, and has made a law after the style of the Medes and Persians that he will not have any servant in the room at dinner-time but Hargreaves. Then he is happy, and over his soup quizzes and chaffs his stately little wife at the other end of the table, in the presence of that faithful domestic, till she declares he shall dine alone in future. Hargreaves has a great idea of rank and the deference due thereto, and has more than once declared his conviction downstairs that no one would imagine from his treatment of her that Mr. Berthon's wife was an earl's daughter.

The earl's daughter is very glad when she can put the white Indian shawl over her shoulders and quit the dining-room for the study again. She loves the room, and invades it on all possible occasions: here are the pictures and some of the photographs at least which used to hang in that odious bachelor establishment in Piccadilly; here, too, is the copy of that portrait which she remembers so well in the gallery of the grim castle in the West, where she first learnt to call George "husband"—the portrait of the girl "Gertrude," whom she tries hard to realize as his mother; and here is the collection of those peculiar books which George says are merely to fill his book-case, and, being useless else, are sedulously locked away in consequence.

She loves the room because it is the one best associated with him who is for the present all her world.

What a fine row there will be when the small animal in the nursery is begged to be initiated into Papa's study too. But long before that will come the time when she will not prefer his room to her own boudoir. I am afraid Lilian was very slow in asserting her independence.

George's principal companion in his old quarters used to be the cottage piano, which now stands over there in the corner. He is a very fair amateur musician himself, and does not intend marriage to take away his young wife's voice. She generally sings to him in the evening: and there is only that one voice in the world which he would care to hear there. But to-night they sit by the fire and talk of Landon, and the music is forgotten.

"By-the-bye, little one,—that fellow Harley said

he would come over to-morrow ; it will be quite a joke introducing him to my uncle."

Why George sits on a footstool instead of in a comfortable chair I cannot explain, any more than what amusement Lilian finds in twining his curly locks about her white fingers.

"How well he is looking now," she says ; "I think we make London happier for him. Poor Marion Delessert ! she still thinks him all that's delightful."

"It does not take much, I should say, to captivate her," he replies.

"How abominable of you !" she exclaims, giving him at the same time a box on the ears which she certainly will not repeat when he is forty. "Women are not such weak fools, as you think them, George."

"I am very glad to hear it, dearest : you see, I only speak from my own experience."

This time he has to prison the avenging hand tightly in his own to prevent summary retribution.

"Lilian ! if you don't behave yourself better to-morrow, I shall put Mr. Landon on to you."

"Do you think he will be very formidable, George ?"

George laughs.

"I shall leave you to fight him alone," he says ; "he is a very ogre with little girls. Come, little one, seriously speaking, I think he ought to come and take up his quarters here, while he is in town ; you know this is really his own house."

"It is not ; it's mine ; you pay him rent for it."

"A very nominal one, child."

"Well, George, of course if you wish it he must come. I am a little frightened of him, but I feel that I shall love him."

"Indeed! Why?"

"Because I feel sure he loves you."

"And you too, say."

"And I love you too, you dear old darling!" she says, folding his curly pate in the circle of her arms.

O weak woman heart! O bewitched manhood! What a spectacle for a member of the British Parliament to present!



CHAPTER III.

"All women are good; good for something, or good for nothing."—PROVERB.

ON the following morning, as George would insist, in spite of his wife's protestations, upon going down to the Temple Church, Lilian was left alone. As usual, she took possession of the study; she did not mind solitude so much now; it gave her time to think of all the rapid whirl of events through which they seemed to be passing. What a dream the last two years appeared! She was quite happy; she was sure of that; could it be possible that such happiness, then, should endure?

We are eager enough, I trow, to predicate for ourselves the indefinite continuance of our present woes: is it not strange that we hardly dare to hope for the long unbroken possession of present joys? If the experience of world-wide human nature were less sad, we might possibly be wiser in this respect.

The ivory Church-service lay as yet unopened between the folded white hands. To judge from the

big volume of sermons, a rather ancient-looking quarto, which was on the little round table by her side, the service Lady Lilian intended to go through would be quite equal to that of the Temple ; and the latter had by this time a good start of her. But appearances are deceptive ; close under the lee of the old-fashioned honest volume appears one of those quite bewitching little books—all red morocco, red letters, gilt edges, photographs and crosses—which indicate a much more modern and elegant way of salvation than those dreadful musty tomes, which it seems quite irreverent to read without our grandmother's spectacles. If we peep into the fly-leaf we find one of Raphael's pretty faces smiling at us, and over against is written something very mysterious and very sweet, signed "Your loving and affectionate Marion." I wonder which of these two books will be laid out upon that pretty white lace apron, when the ivory book is disposed of ?

The fact is, Lilian is thinking of the afternoon visitor that is to be, and holding mental rehearsals of the scene "Enter, from left and right, Mr. Greville Landon and the Lady Lilian Berthon."

In George's photograph album is the only likeness extant of her august relative ; she fetches it, and contemplates the face. It is a vignette, and the artist of Milan has made a very fair study of the noble head. He does not look very formidable she thinks, after all.

Then Lilian compares one of her Madonnas with the "Gertrude" which hangs so sweetly and quietly upon the wall. On either side of it, on their carved oaken brackets, are the "Beatrice" and "Maidenhood" just as they stood in his old rooms ; Lilian thinks them a very lovely trio. Suddenly it occurs to

her that she has seen a face like to "Gertrude's" before ; and she remembers Landon's photograph, and compares them together. Mr. Landon is not at all like the Madonna, but there is that in both his and "Gertrude's" face which recalls the other : the same quiet confident gaze from the deep-set eyes,—the same finely chiselled features,—the same proud, sad lines about the mouth. If the picture would only smile !

As Lilian looks at her, she feels a sort of awe creeping over her ; it did not seem the face of one who had trodden in the beaten track of common life. But the picture had been painted before the curse had fallen. What curse ? Could Lilian have overheard the talk of Maynard and her cousin Fienne that day in the park at St. Ivor's—I wonder what would have been her reflections that Sunday morning ?

At last the Church Service was opened and conscientiously travelled through. The Psalms read so strangely without the organ. Lilian thought how astonished those good people would be who held it wicked to sing them in church, when they got to heaven. For herself she much preferred the pleasant sin of singing like a little bird on every available opportunity. But then she was a woman, a very child in religion, and, doubtless, was an object of great attraction to the Arch Deceiver.

The sermon was never read after all, nor the little red morocco book either—for in came nurse with the little animal from upstairs, and everything else in the world was forgotten but the rosy smiles of Master George Landon Berthon. And when her husband returned from the Temple, that was the trio he found in possession of his beloved room. Alas ! poor George !

Sometimes the Berthons went to evening church; and they generally dined in the middle of the day. But, as Mr. Landon would not tell his whereabouts, and had signified his intention of coming to Park Lane in the afternoon—dinner was fixed for to-day at seven, in order to inveigle him into that meal. The Grosvenor Square people were scattered, but a detachment thence might be looked for later.

It was early in the afternoon, and George had only just finished his weed, when a peal at the bell announced the arrival of somebody. Lilian sat with a beating heart in the drawing-room whilst George went forth to find his visitor. It was he.

"Where shall I find her?" she heard a man's deep voice saying, as they came up the stairs; and, the next moment, George Berthon's wife and Mr. Greville Landon stood face to face.

As the quick gray eyes fell upon the girl they were instantly lighted up with a glance of admiration; how fair she was! The jet beads that were woven in the soft coils of her hair did not shine with a greater gloss than they: the soft, warm neck, where the golden locket with its pearl cross lay, was as white as the delicate lace that bound the square-cut bosom of her dress. He saw that she was very beautiful, and he rejoiced.

When George said, "Here is my little wife, uncle!" and Landon's face broke into one of his fascinating smiles, Lilian felt an almost irresistible impulse drawing her towards him. But, without waiting for formal words, he took each of her hands in his own, and with one fond look of recognition and welcome into those lovely child-like eyes, he kissed her tenderly.

"For many long years George, my boy," he said,

turning to him, and still holding his pretty prisoner fast, "I have known no such pleasure as it is to me to see, and to speak to your wife."

A few minutes afterwards he had taken the easy chair beside her, and she was talking away to him as if she had known him all her life.

Naturally, the talk was chiefly of themselves ; as to himself and his wanderings, whenever they were alluded to, he touched upon them carelessly, and led the conversation back to England and his friends.

It is wonderful what confidence perfect ease in one whose society somewhat embarrasses us rapidly diffuses. Lilian had but very vague conceptions of Mr. Landon as a social animal, though she had heard a great deal about him, in one way and another. That he was very rich, very proud, and very clever, had been notions of him from earliest childhood, which to her seemed to pass current among certain people. It had not occurred to her that the austere and repellent manner, with which she had so often heard him credited, had probably been evinced towards those who had most persistently endeavoured to inveigle him into the glittering meshes of a phase of London Society which was uncongenial to him. For some reason or another, George had not very often talked of him since their marriage ; he had once told her that he really knew so little about Mr. Landon's history, life, and character, as to make it impossible for him to make herself better acquainted with either. He never tired of dwelling upon his kindness and affection towards himself individually ; but, knowing how different his own experience had been from what the world thought and believed of Landon, he seldom, if ever, participated in discussions upon the character

of one who by many was said to be one of the most remarkable men of his day.

Lilian was soon won by the fascinating manner, which she forgot for the time as having heard described as dangerous. He told her very much what he thought of her ; the pretty, laughing child, all whose soul was in her eyes, which he remembered of a few years ago ; how she had changed since she had taken George in hand !—and that he would not be guilty of ministering to the vanity of one to whose gentle and generous sway he fully intended to surrender his own heart.

“I look upon you and George as one,” he said. I consider him in the place of a son to me, and I have long hoped that his wife would be my daughter ; will you accept the mission, Lilian ?”

Lilian made the proffered alliance ; in fact, she was quite helpless in the matter.

“And you will come to us at once,” she said, with animation, “and take up your abode here as long as you remain in London—will you not ?”

“The number of my visitors would quite appal you !” he replied, smiling.

“You may bring the whole hotel with you, if you like !” she responds ; “as long as you come yourself.”

I am afraid Lilian was either a very great hypocrite, or did not know what she was saying.

The battle, in which George hardly interfered—perhaps, because he foresaw the inevitable issue thereof—was interrupted, for the time, by the simultaneous entrance of five o'clock tea, and Mr. Harley Grey.

The human part of the two arrivals, not having the faintest idea that Mr. Landon was not still in Italy,

was considerably astonished at the trio upon which he found himself intruding. He instinctively guessed the personality of the visitor.

"Uncle, here is my friend Harley Grey ; how-d'ye-do, old fellow—I'm so glad you have come—let me introduce you to Mr. Landon."

"It would seem that George rather enjoyed his friend's dilemma. Mr. Landon held out his hand, and said—

"It gives me very great pleasure, I assure you, Mr. Grey, to make your acquaintance ; I know you already in a double capacity," he added, smiling.

Harley looked puzzled.

"Your name appears more often than his own in the letters of my correspondent here," pointing to George ; "and it has long been my wish to become personally acquainted with a certain successful young poet."

Similar compliments are often more impertinent than flattering ; but it would have been hard indeed for one far less susceptible than Harley Grey to have resisted the kindness and sincerity that breathed in every word of Mr. Landon's greeting. He reciprocated the compliment, as well as he could, and surrendered himself without more ado to the charm of the society in which he unexpectedly found himself, and the graceful empire of the queen who presided over the blue and gold china cups and the silver gypsy-kettle on the tea-table, near him.

When the men were left alone in the drawing-room before dinner, Mr. Landon reverted to the topic that was uppermost in his thoughts.

"George !" he said, taking his nephew's hand, "I have not half congratulated you upon your new dis-

inction. It is strange enough for me to find you the family man you have become, but that my boy is actually a member of parliament, I shall realize better when I have seen you and heard you in the House. Well, George, you fought well, and you were quite right to fight, if you thought you could succeed. I have no doubt you will soon find yourself quite at home among your parliamentary friends; my only fear is, lest you should attempt too much.

"Thank you, uncle, my practice at the bar interferes very little with my parliamentary duties; as to the work, it is, at present, at least, my delight. I fear that Lilian is the party most injured."

"You must settle that between you," said Landon, laughing. "Ah! George, you young fellows make me feel very old, and worn out!"

Harley looked at the fine upright figure before him, and the serene intelligence of a face which certainly belonged to no decay of body or mind; and he was much struck at that moment, by the likeness between uncle and nephew.

They were now rejoined by the ladies; for Nora Celadon accompanied her sister. Lady Vi and Aubrey having preferred going to evening service, Eustace and she left the earl and countess to themselves, and came round to invade George and Lilian. Nora had taken possession of her number two of this history—whose extraordinary and thrilling adventures will demand a volume to themselves by-and-bye—whom she had found, unconscious of his great destiny, asleep in the cradle upstairs. She brought him in in great triumph to undergo his introduction to Greville Landon, which great personage Nora herself was

very little afraid of, and greeted with a sunny smile of many pleasant reminiscences.

"You did not use to run away from me, like your sister here," said Landon, smiling, after explaining his sudden appearance to her.

"Now, Mr. Landon, please to forget everything but the patriarchal blessing you have to bestow on this precious burden of mine; you must take baby in your arms—please, Mr. Landon, do! I assure you he's not at all heavy or vicious!"

Now Lady Nora did not exactly know what thoughts were chasing each other through Mr. Landon's mind, as his eyes fell upon the infant before him; happily, her playful ease served to mask what was best unseen; and the grim man of the world took the child in his arms, whilst the fair young mother, with beating heart and burning cheeks, stood by, holding her sister Nora's white arm fast—and though Harley Grey thought that his face became

"The tablet of unutterable thoughts,"

he betrayed nothing but joy, and uttered the, for him, most conventional of compliments, and most orthodox of blessings. It was Eustace who dispersed "the crowd," as he called it, and begged the present banishment of Master George Landon to his proper sphere.

Then, when mamma and Nora had had their whisper at the door,—Heaven knows what about!—the adults of the party descended to the dining-room.

Lord Lisle and Harley had to content themselves without ladies, at least, on the staircase; once at table, Lady Nora did her best to multiply the sex in herself.

"Now, Mr. Landon, of course you are going to spend the season in town, this year?"

"I do not think so."

"Oh! you must!" she said, looking beseechingly at him with her dark laughing eyes; "it is to be a very gay one, and I am under strict instructions to find a husband."

"You had better propose to Mr. Landon, while you have the chance," said Eustace.

"Perhaps I will when the season is over," she retorted, without visible emotion.

"If I stay here till the end of June, Lady Nora, will you initiate me into the fashionable world?"

"Very well, Mr. Landon, I take that as a promise. You have no idea," she added, laughing gaily, "the sensation you will create!"

"It is of no use struggling against fate, I know," replied Landon, with a quiet smile; "there was a time when I was delighted to let the ladies have their own way in everything: and now, when I am wiser," he added, mournfully, "they do not ask my permission."



CHAPTER IV.

"He that will caper with me for a thousand marks, let him lend me the money, and have at him."

WINTER'S TALE.

WHEN the party in Park Lane broke up, that night, Mr. Landon took Harley with him as far as his hotel. The former had spoken quite truly when he laid stress upon the gratification afforded him in making the

acquaintance of Berthon's friend ; nor did he intend that his desires should be satisfied by the chance opportunities of their meeting at his nephew's house.

"I hope I shall have the pleasure of meeting you soon again," were his words to Harley, as he shook him by the hand, when they were about to part, after a conversation with the young poet which had both interested and puzzled him.

"It is very kind of you to say so, Mr. Landon," responded Harley. "I should indeed like to hope the same."

"In the summer months," said Landon, "I live out of town, at a cottage of mine, up the river. George used to be very fond of coming down there—unless he brings his wife with him I do not suppose I shall see him now—but whether he honours me or no, I shall hope to see you, Mr. Grey : if you are fond of boating and fishing, with the alternative of literary society, a run down will repay you sometimes."

The usually pale features of the young man were flushed with a momentary excitement. If a Peri had brought to him a latch-key to the fabulous gardens, he would not have experienced a more violent joy from the prospect, than he did from the one thus afforded him in Landon's courteous invitation.

The latter read the expression of his auditor's face in a moment, and forbade to prolong the interview at the time.

As Harley Grey walked home, and thought over the last few pleasant hours of the day, more particularly of the remarkable man whose acquaintance he had made, he did not divine that from the same kindly generous and just hand, which had but even then wrung his own in almost affectionate farewell, had

come the review which had brought his first volumes of poems into prominence.

"Where have you been all day?" greeted him in a more amiable voice than usual, on his return, from his brother Lawrence, who, with his feet up on either side of the fireplace, was roasting himself in company with his congenial clay, and all alone.

"With Berthon," was the laconic reply.

"I have been waiting for you an age."

"I am very sorry, Laurie. Why have you been waiting?"

"There has been the devil of a row here to-night."

As that family contingency was not of rare occurrence, Harley merely asked, "What about?" without evincing the astonishment that might have been expected.

"Mother's gone out of her senses, and broached possible suicide."

"What about?" he asked again, half-choked in the clouds of tobacco smoke.

Thereupon Lawrence threw his bullet-head over the back of the chair, and laughed uproariously.

"Annie's engaged to be married!" he gasped out at length.

"Engaged!—to whom?"

"That 'squirt,' Treecher, a banker's clerk, on £120 a year, ha, ha, ha!" and Lawrence roared again.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Harley, too annoyed to share his brother's mirth.

"Mother was simply mad when Annie told her. We've had the finest lark in the world: I wouldn't have missed it for any odds."

"What does my father say?"

"Say!—that he'll see them both hanged first. But

he doesn't really care ; he'll come round—it's mother who made the row. Lord ! Harley, you should have seen her ! you know she always destined them for countesses at least.

"Hang it ! there's a little difference between a countess and £120 a-year. Ridiculous—absurd !"

The fact would appear to be true nevertheless. But Harley had not much leisure to think over it, just then.

"Harley !" said Lawrence, suddenly, "can you lend me £25 ?"

The request was by no means uncommon in its nature, but the loans had generally been for smaller amounts. As Lawrence was already in his debt for twice the sum he asked, Harley was not particularly cheered by the news.

"What do you want it for, Lawrence ?"

"Why do you want to know ?" asked the other, surlily.

"To ascertain the probability of my getting it back again."

"Excuse me, Harley, but you're awfully hard on a fellow like me ?"

"In what way ? in lending you money ?" said his brother, with a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"In making such a fuss about it."

"I could not lend you £25, in any event ; I have not half that sum by me at the present moment."

"Well then, let me have ten."

"Tell me what you want it for."

"I've asked my father," returned Lawrence, not heeding him, "and he swears he won't let me have a farthing above my beggarly screw : if you don't lend it me, I shall get it out of mother, that's all. I must

have it. Harley said nothing. After a minute's pause, during which Lawrence stared doggedly between the bars of the grate, the latter spoke.

"I'll tell you, if you promise to keep it close," he said, "I am not in the habit of talking about your affairs," replied his brother, hotly.

"D—n it! who said you were? I owe Vivian Prideling £20, and he wants it on Tuesday."

"Vivian Prideling!" exclaimed Harley, in astonishment, "Did he lend it to you, Lawrence?"

"Lend it me? no, confound him! he won it of me the other night."

"Or won it of *me*—which?" retorted the other bitterly.

"I don't care a straw: let me have the cash, that's all I want."

"You know my salary, Lawrence," said his brother, while his breath came short and fast, "and what I do with it. You owe me at the present moment about £50, that I have lent you, because you said your own earnings would not even dress you as a gentleman; I would lend it to you over again, for the same cause, but I am not going to throw my money into the sea to afford you and Prideling the means of gambling!"

Lamb was right. How despicable are the lenders,—how magnanimous the borrowers of this world! Harley thought himself mean; unquestionably his brother did; but to cut one's own throat in the fashion he was invited to do, was even a less tolerable fate than either the reflection, or the accusation. Lawrence was not violent; his *arrière-pensées* explained it.

"I never thought you would," he said sullenly, and a significantly pleasant smile came over his dissipated

features, "I shall get it out of mother, and she can let the books run on."

"Till when?"

"Till I return it."

Harley's thin lips compressed themselves in bitter scorn. "You might as well ask Berthon for it," continued Lawrence, who betrayed no emotion, and smoked with philosophic calm.

"A gentlemanly act!" said Harley, his eyes flashing with indignation.

"I shall play again on Tuesday," returned Lawrence, still staring straight before him, and speaking in the suppressed undertone which usually preceded slightly livelier scenes, "one can't lose twice running—so the money's safe."

Harley endeavoured to dissuade his infatuated brother. He would have been as sensibly employed in trying to turn the coals in the grate into the sovereigns, the lack of which caused the dilemma of the moment. The two brothers did not part, an hour later, on the very best of terms. Altogether, the news of the evening did not form a pleasant prospect for Monday morning.

A celebrated writer, in a well-known work, has demonstrated the fallacy of the supposition that the agony of remorse, or the pain of sorrows presses heaviest on its victim in the hours of night. He tells us that it is our waking thoughts which have to bear most; and surely he is right, for does not the renewed knowledge of grief come with the force of sudden and disastrous news at the moment of our returning consciousness of life? Mr. Bob Smythe, the autocrat of St. Cecily's, would, doubtless, remind us of the proverb, that Hope is a good breakfast, but a bad supper—if

he did not, that is to say, invert it to suit some other view of his own. But ask the heart, which is breaking with the disappointment of unrequited passion, the hour of its greater suffering: it is when life returns with the sunshine of a new day, and the "sweet birds twitter in the crimson dawn," that the poisoned shaft of memory drives deepest home; and grief is the most poignant on that threshold between "the two worlds misnamed, death and existence."

Harley Grey was exhausted, and fell to sleep—a sleep of wild dreams his always was. In the grey light of morning he woke, and his sensitive mind was at once assailed by the oppressive consciousness of some new sorrow or chagrin, or disappointment, which he could not for the moment guess of. Annie's mad engagement—Lawrence's money difficulties, and their quarrel—another week of monotonous toil to hand. It was not of much use lying in the dark dawn, thinking of these things. So he rose, and lit the fire in his little back room, and sat down to drive reflection away by study. He was in the habit of getting up at unearthly hours; the cold winter mornings did not frighten that fiercely burning spirit, though it did his weak chest no good; he told Berthon that the one or two hours he got thus was the only part of the day he could call his own. The candle-light died in the dawn, and he read on, till he guessed they would be all at breakfast, when he put away his manuscripts and books, and descended.

The Greys were early people. Mr. Grey made a profession of being at his office in the city at half past nine, and Lawrence usually accompanied him. Whatever leisure hours that young gentleman required, he cut off from the other end of the working day.

It was Charlotte's mission to make the tea, Mrs.

Grey's to utter querulous directions concerning the process, and her spouse's to grumble at the results. This fair apportionment of labour was gone through by the time Harley joined the family circle that morning. He had lingered upstairs purposely, to avoid the passionate confidences of his mother on the subject of Annie's crime, or his brother's recklessness. This was not heroic on the part of Harley, but it was a tribute to the human weakness which he, in common with us all, shared.

When he entered the breakfast room, Annie was not there ; nor did she appear before he left. Breakfast was despatched in conventional silence. The Greys were not a talkative, nor with each other a confidential family, except when they were quarrelling. Harley himself had most important business awaiting him, which necessitated his departure on that morning half-an-hour earlier than usual ; so he quickly kissed the pale cheeks of his limp mother, and left his home behind him with a sigh—will it be believed?—of satisfaction. But he was not permitted to depart without a word from one, at least, of those he was supposed to love best.

"Harley ! Harley !" said a voice behind him, as he was about to open the front door. He turned, and the next moment, Katie's arms were fast locked round his neck, and her soft curls falling over his white comforter and great coat.

"Please put it in your pocket, dear boy," she half whispered, holding out a mysterious little parcel, "and open it at lunch-time, please, Harley !"

"Very well, darling, I will," he replied, and with half-a-dozen rapid kisses, they parted.

How Harley laughed when he opened the bag at

the office, and found Katie's present to consist of pear-drops ! For all that, he could not see the writing on the draft sheets for a minute or two, as speechless thoughts drove a mist before his eyes.

The east wind blew keen as he crossed the squares, and Holborn, and struck into the purlieus of Seven Dials, on his way to the West. I don't think he heeded the squalid forms and miserable hovels of the subterraneous Andamans through whose wild regions he wended his way on that morning.

The glorious prophecies on the flaring placards of the rag shops, and the innumerable hosts of boots on the narrow pavement, whose makers and vendors seemed to dwell in the sewers, failed to attract him, as they usually did.

Harley's thoughts were elsewhere. Not in the world of the home he had just left—not in the world of the legal jobbery he was bound for—but in his third world, the paradise of memory, and imagination, and hope, was he roaming. And who was walking among the asphodels, and living in the first stanzas of the new lyric he was labouring to conceive ? Ah ! that face—that face ! Was it possible that he was dreaming of Evelyn Maynard ?

Whatever he was dreaming of, he soon came to his senses when he found himself suddenly in Pall Mall, and in the shadow of the door-way of Mr. Morley's offices.

Mr. Montagu Morley, solicitor, was a very great man ; at least he said he was, and some of the world's big wigs, and many of the world's little ones were fools, or wise enough to believe the same. He was very far removed from the vulgar attorney ; indeed, nothing but the very pink and cream of legal business

ever received his attention. He had fine offices in Pall Mall, in the neighbourhood of, and nearly opposite to, the War Office. With the Carlton Senior and Junior so close at hand, and St. James's Square at his back, it was, indeed, natural that a very superfine atmosphere should be sniffed by the nose of Mr. Morley. It was a long, straight, sharp nose too, set in the middle of a face which ladies declared was both clever-looking and handsome. Mr. Morley's head was a big one, slightly tipped forward on a craning neck, but supported beneath the chin by the stiffest of pointed cravats, and a big black bow for a neck-tie. His hair was sparse, and forty-five years of honourable toil—not pettifogging swindling, you will observe—had worn a bald patch above the big frowning forehead. This gentleman was tall and thin, but withal, he was commanding in figure, and he brushed back his light brown whiskers, and cleared his throat with the air of the greatest importance.

To this professional magnate had Harley Grey been articled as a pupil, and now he was occupying a prominent position in his office, at a salary of three hundred pounds per annum. He was not Mr. Morley's managing clerk because Mr. Morley loved him, but because Mr. Morley was conscious that he was possessed of brains which he might go far to get the duplicate of in the profession. Here, then, did that foolish dreamer spend the hours between ten a.m. and six p.m. throughout the year. And Mr. Montagu Morley must reveal, himself, all further particulars concerning his business, his office, and his own individuality, which may be required.

That person must be possessed of a more than

average sanguine temperament, who imagines that Mr. Morley is in the habit of revealing anything at all that he is not obliged to.

"Is he here?" is the pertinent inquiry Harley addresses to the little man who opens the door to him.

"Long ago, sir," replies the little man, and bustles away.

Harley's room is decidedly cheerful; it looks on Pall Mall; and from his seat in the window he can see Sydney Herbert folded in his cloak and lost in graceful reverie, though in bronze, opposite.

He is soon at work at his papers; at eleven o'clock the little man comes in to his room with the letter-book for him.

"Hot work for the Government, to-night," says Harley, rising from his chair and placing himself back to the fire.

Mr. Hambleby rubs his hands and laughs.

"No, sir,—no, sir,—hot work for the 'Tories,' you mean. Have you seen the *Times*, this morning, sir?"

"No, I have not. Anything particular in the *Telegraph*?"

"Well—" says Hambleby, ruminating, "I——"

At that moment the bell rings in Mr. Morley's room, and the small patron of the *Telegraph* becomes mindful that it is not the time for the discussion of politics.

"Bad temper, this morning, sir,—very," he says, referring to his master, and preparing to hurry away.

"Whose knock is that?" says Harley, as a thundering tattoo makes the office echo.

"Mr. John Maynard," returns the clerk, looking through the glass door.

Harley remembers he has an appointment with Mr. Morley at eleven, and watches the tall figure down the passage.

END OF VOL. I.



